12
健速
Takehaya

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」（HJ文庫）で作家デビュー。
今頃ツイッターを始めました。興味のある方は『健速』か『@Takehaya_info』で検索してみてください。

ボコ

兵庫出身のイラストレーター。
好物はやきそば。最近は大盛りイカ焼きそばにハマリ中。

カバーイラスト／ボコ 装丁／渡辺宏一

六畳間の侵略者!?

12

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た03-02-14

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HJ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

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幽霊少女に本体が加わったことで、圧縮率がさらに上昇、和気藹々ぶりにも拍車がかかるころな荘一〇六号室。その中でひとり、ゆりかだけは悩んでいた。前回の騒動以来、孝太郎にどう接していいのか分からなくなっていたのだ。そんな最中、真希のもとに負傷引退したはずの元ダークネイビィ・真那が姿を現す――ついに謎の魔法少女が動き出した!!

HOBBY JAPAN

六畳間の侵略者!? 12

せまる巨大火球に、

逃げてぇっ、桜庭せんぱぁいっ!!

……さようなら、お嬢ちゃん

晴海は呆然と立ち尽くす――

「……こんな、普通の女の子みたいな感情が、私の中にもあったなんて……」

Article 16

Studying is forbidden during the time stated below. However, Kasagi Shizuka (Landlord of Corona House, residing in room 206) may grant special permission.

- Japanese Time (GMT + 9) 0:00 - 6:00
- Any time that Kasagi Shizuka (Landlord of Corona House, residing in room 206) has arbitrarily decided upon.

Article 16 Postscript

There's a limit to these kind of things, a limit!! What's the point of doing it until she breaks!?

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Everyone's Weekend

Part 1

Friday, April 23

The Higashihongan family has been protecting the Higashihongan shrine as the head priests for many generations. With a long lasting history, the branch shrine that is the Higashihongan shrine has existed for over 500 years. And the main shrine, the Hongan shrine, has existed for longer than there exists records of it.

Because of their long history, the Higashihongan family owns vast lands and assets, and they are one of the few distinct families in Harukaze city. Thanks to that, their land is the size of a baseball stadium, with a large and luxurious Japanese-styled mansion on it and a garden that has been devised in such a way that all four seasons can be enjoyed to their fullest within their land.

"I-I've come to a helluva place…"

Having been guided to the guest room, Yurika looked around with restless eyes. Normally she lived in the wardrobe of a small six tatami mat big room, so to her, this place was like a different world. Despite sitting in a wide room, she couldn't take it easy, and was instead only getting more and more anxious.

Ahh! Save me, Satomi-san!

Yurika instinctively called out for her roommate's help in her mind. This room also had a very luxurious feel to it. Though it wasn't a room that had been covered in gold to show off riches, as Yurika sat all alone in the room surrounded by the finely crafted pillars, the lacquered furniture, and the magnificent drawings on the wall, she felt like she was being looked down on by the rich. It was like her surroundings were telling her that this was no place for a poor girl like her and to hurry on out of here and go to somewhere more fitting for her. Of course, this was all just Yurika's complex. In fact, the residents of this mansion had welcomed her in with utmost care and were far from looking down on her.

"I am sorry for calling for you, Yurika-chan."

As proof of this, a resident of this mansion entered the guest room with a smile.

Her name was Higashihongan Kanae. She was the wife of the current head of the family, Higashihongan Soutarou, and the mother of Yurika's friend, Sanae.

"I wanted to talk to you in peace and quiet. About Nana-chan for example."

Yurika and Kanae had a common acquaintance.

Part 2

On a certain Friday after school, Yurika had visited the Higashihongan family on her own. This was because when she had visited this mansion before with Theia and the others, Kanae had asked if she could come by another day so that the two could talk. So Yurika took some time off, though she didn't have much to take time off from, to come visit the Higashihongan family.

"Yurika-chan, could you stand up and spin around to show me that outfit?"

"Ah, Yes! …Like this?"

Yurika accepted Kanae's request and stood up before slowly rotating around. Staring at Yurika, Kanae had a nostalgic look in her eyes.

"Thank you, Yurika-chan. Though some small details have changed, it really is the outfit Nana-chan had."

"Yes. These are Nana-san's clothes that I adjusted for myself. I… am a bit taller than Nana-san… so I couldn't wear them like they were…"

"That's true. Nana-chan was pretty small… Thank you, Yurika-chan."

Kanae gently smiled at Yurika who seemed to be quite embarrassed. Yurika was embarrassed because there were problems with her adjustments. Nana had a very delicate body, so Yurika couldn't wear the outfit unless she made the area around the waist and butt larger. The only adjustment she could boast about would be the adjustment around the chest region.

"So… is Nana-chan okay?"

Kanae waited for Yurika to sit back down before continuing to speak. As she voiced her question, some anxiety could be seen in her expression. She had invited Yurika because she wanted to ask this question.

"Yes. But around spring last year, she was seriously injured and can no longer use magic… That's why I, her disciple, took on her role."

"So that's what happened…"

Hearing that Nana was safe was enough for the tension in Kanae's expression to go away. Seeing that, Yurika could sense what kind of relationship Kanae and Nana had.

"Kanae-san, you cooperated with Nana-san, right?"

A cooperator was a Japanese that helped a magician from Folsaria when they were operating in Japan.

Since the magicians came from Folsaria, a different world, they were technically illegal aliens. Because of that, they are not registered anywhere on Earth. So for them to operate in Japan, they need someone to cooperate with them.

"Yes… Until a little after we defeated Maya, Dark Navy."

Maya was Maki's master and the previous Dark Navy. Nana had defeated Maya with Kanae's cooperation. Because of that, Maya retired and allowed for Maki to succeed her as Dark Navy. Those were the events of several years ago.

"After that, Nana-chan left without saying a word… so I was a little worried. I'm happy to hear that she's okay, Yurika-chan."

"Kanae-san, Nana-san was, uhm…"

"I know. Nana-chan left in order to not put our lives in dangers."

"Yes."

"There was also the problem with Sanae's body, so I'm sure she wanted to relieve me of my role as fast as possible."

"I think so too. Nana-san always said to stop coming to see her because it was dangerous too…"

Eleven years ago, Nana had been unable to fully save Sanae. She was only able to perform an imperfect merging of Sanae's soul with her body with her magic, so she had expected that Sanae's life would eventually end. That's why in order for Kanae to spend as much time with her family as possible, Nana had quietly left. Or so Yurika and Kanae thought.

"About Sanae… could it be because of you that she's gotten more energetic?"

There was one more thing on Kanae's mind apart from Nana's safety, and that was the reason for her daughter's sudden recovery.

Kanae had been told by Nana that Sanae wouldn't live for long. In fact, as the years passed on, Sanae grew weaker and weaker. But just as Kanae had prepared for her daughter's death, Sanae's condition suddenly improved. And shortly thereafter, Sanae brought home Yurika as her friend. Seeing what Yurika had with her, Kanae reached a certain conclusion, and that was that Yurika had healed Sanae with magic.

"I did help, but magic alone couldn't have saved her… Uhm, about one quarter of it was my doing."

Since Yurika's skills with magic were inferior to Nana's, she couldn't save Sanae on her own. In fact, Kiriha had been the one to treat Sanae while she was supporting her. And Yurika believed the biggest reason Sanae had been saved was because of the bonds she had to the people around her. She thought of her own actions as half of half the work, or one fourth.

"The ratio doesn't matter. Thank you for saving Sanae, Yurika-chan."

"U-Uhm…"

Being directly thanked by Kanae, Yurika blushed and was flustered.

I-It's kind of been strange lately…

Recently, there had been more cases of Yurika being thanked, trusted and needed. Since this was something she couldn't imagine up until now, Yurika was embarrassed by this situation. This was because she hadn't noticed her own growth, so she believed her surroundings had suddenly changed.

But… I kinda feel really happy…

And while she felt strange about the change in her surroundings, she also felt happy. The sensation that she could be of help to others made her more positive. Although she wasn't as good as Nana, if she did everything she could, she might be able to save someone like she had with Sanae. That's what she felt like doing, and that was her original goal to begin with. In other words, one could say that the incident regarding Sanae turned Yurika into a full-fledged magical girl. And thanks to her maturing, her abilities were improving as well. While she might still not compare to the Nana of the past right now, she might in the future. Right now, Yurika was no longer pessimistic and was instead starting to believe in her own future.

"Besides, when she is with you, Sanae acts like she has returned to what she used to be like… As her parent, I couldn't be happier. I guess I have to show some gratitude for that as well. Thank you, Yurika-chan."

Thanks to the hard work of Yurika and the others, the two Sanaes had managed to return as one, but it would be a stretch to say that they were now one and the same.

Normally, the modest personality developed by Sanae's body was on the surface. While Sanae had been struggling against her disease, she had to restrain herself in order to not get sick, causing her personality to become more modest.

However, when she was with Yurika, Koutarou and the others, her personality as a ghost that was carved into her soul surfaced. This personality was the one she had before her soul and body split, and it was more active than if she had matured normally in her body. Simply put, it was a lot more childish.

Though the two had managed to safely merge, their personalities weren't quite blending in, and they would suddenly switch between the two. When she was with Yurika and the others, she was bright and cheerful, and when she was not, she was a lot more withdrawn. As a result, it looked like she was putting up a brave front or was suffering from multiple personality disorder. However, they shared memories and still liked and hated the same things, so it could still be argued that they were one.

On top of that, to Kanae and her family, Sanae acted and looked like she did before the entire ordeal when she was with Yurika and the others. Since Kanae and the others were bothered by Sanae's modest personality ever since she had been admitted to the hospital, this was a welcome change.

According to Kiriha's explanation it seemed like Sanae's two personalities would eventually blend into one. Once fully merged, Sanae's personality would probably end up somewhere between the modest Sanae and the active Sanae. Kiriha said that it would probably be close to the personality Sanae would develop if her soul hadn't split from her body to begin with.

And that change had already started. Even when Sanae wasn't beside Yurika, Koutarou and the others, she was a little more cheerful.

"But… it really wasn't just thanks to me. Everything worked out because Sanae-chan loves everyone and because everyone loves Sanae-chan."

Yurika lightly shook her head and put her hands on her chest before tilting her head and smiling.

"So Kanae-san, if possible, I want you to be grateful for the feelings Sanae-chan and everyone share for each other. That is what saved Sanae-chan…"

"Yurika-chan…"

Hearing Yurika's answer, Kanae's eyes opened wide. But they soon thereafter narrowed and she smiled at Yurika. Her expression at this time looked really happy, as if she had found something nostalgic.

"…You really are Nana-chan's disciple."

"Eh?"

This time, Yurika opened her eyes in surprise.

"That earnest heart trying to do right, that strong will that won't lose to anything and that deep love that wraps around everything… You are just like Nana-chan."

The words spoken by Kanae had more than enough power to surprise Yurika.

"Kanae-san…"

To Yurika who was striving to become like Nana, these words were the best kind of praise she could receive.

"Thank you very much!"

"Fufufu… I just hope my girl could turn out like you…"

"I can't recommend that. I don't have very good grades…"

"Oh my, is that so?"

"Sadly, yes…"

Like that, the two began chatting about themselves and their common friend with smiles on their faces. It was as if two old friends had met for the first time in ten years, so lively chatter could be heard from the guest room until the sun set.

Part 3

During their talk, Yurika gave Kanae a simple introduction to everyone's situation and about Sanae. She believed that Kanae would keep it a secret, so Yurika spoke in a casual manner. Kanae did the same as she happily listened to Yurika. But when Yurika got to the part where Kiriha used a machine that used spiritual energy, Kanae furrowed her brows and took Yurika out to the city at night.

"This is the place, Yurika-chan."

"This is pretty dark…"

"Wait a moment, I'll put the lights on right now."

"Continue All Light."

"Right, Yurika-chan was a magician."

"Yes."

Kanae had taken Yurika to the basement of a certain building. It was an abandoned building that hadn't seen use in years, so when Yurika lit it up with her magic, she could see unlawfully dumped consumer electronics and cars, as well as a bunch of cracks in the walls and ceiling.

"Is there something about these ruins?"

It didn't look too out of place for Yurika, as it looked like any other ruins.

"Just a moment… I think it was around here…"

Relying on Yurika's magic to light up the area, Kanae searched her vicinity. After a few minutes had passed and Yurika began fearing the darkness of the ruins, Kanae finally found what she was looking for.

"Found it!"

"Kyaa!?"

"What's wrong, Yurika-chan?"

"N-No, it's nothing…"

Since she was a magical girl, Yurika blushed as she couldn't say that she was afraid of the dark. Unaware of Yurika's situation, Kanae called her over to herself.

"Yurika, could you come over here."

"Okay."

Yurika tilted her head while approaching Kanae. Kanae had a serious expression on her face, much different from what she had shown a moment before.

"It's about this…"

"This is…"

Yurika could see the remains of a destroyed machine. It seemed like the machine had been destroyed by a violent attack and fragments of all sizes were scattered about. And looking at the corrosion and dust gathered on the fragments, it became clear that many years had passed since the machine was destroyed.

"Huh!? Isn't this!?"

Yurika who wasn't big on machinery just assumed it was some broken device, but after staring at it for a while, she noticed a familiar seal and design.

"Isn't this Kiriha-san's device!?"

The remains of the machine looked just like what Kiriha had. It had the same unique traits to it like Karama, Korama and the device used to treat Sanae. They had clear common features that even Yurika could distinguish.

"Spiritual energy devices belong to the underground people… so why would it be in a place like this?"

"This is what Dark Navy… uhm, more accurately the previous Dark Navy, was using. Yurika-chan, look down."

"Ah!?"

Yurika could see some kind of pattern carved into the ground by her feet. It had completely lost its power, but it was a magical circle used for rituals. As a magician, Yurika quickly understood what that meant.

"Kanae-san, did the previous Dark Navy use magic and machines from the underground people together!?"

"If this is a machine the underground people use then there is no doubt about it. Nana-chan said that Maya was using this device to store her sacrifice's spiritual energy in order to use it for her ritual."

Hearing Yurika's story about Sanae, Kanae was reminded of this place. She then determined that it would be better if Yurika took a look for herself, and so she guided her here.

"…Which means that at the very least, Darkness Rainbow came into contact with the underground people ten years ago and worked together…"

Yurika's expression stiffened as she felt a chill run down her spine.

I-I have to hurry and talk to Kiriha-san about this!

Thinking back about the time when they had used magic and a spiritual energy device to save Sanae, it was hard to imagine just how much power one could gain from using the two together. And when considering that Darkness Rainbow came into contact with the underground people ten years ago, and those people most likely being from the faction that stood against Kiriha, one could imagine that Rainbow Darkness could use spiritual energy to fight against Rainbow Heart, and at the same time, the radical faction that stood against Kiriha would be able to use magic.

At this rate, Rainbow Heart will lose! Kiriha-san too!

Of course, the opponent wouldn't show the ace up their sleeve during small skirmishes, they would instead save it for a major battle.

Thinking about that, Yurika couldn't imagine that Rainbow Heart or Kiriha would have an easy time.

Part 4

Today, there were no club activities after school for the knitting society. The current president, Harumi, had an examination scheduled in the hospital tomorrow, so it was common practice for the society to take the day before off to rest.

Having suddenly gotten some free time on his hands, Koutarou decided to visit Clan. He hadn't talked a lot with Clan lately, but she had been of help often during important events. He figured that he should go see her without bringing with him any problems.

"Clan, are you shutting yourself in again?"

"If I don't shut myself in, I can't get any research done."

When Koutarou entered the Cradle, Clan was facing a computer in her laboratory. She had a ton of topics she wanted to research, such as Signaltin and time and space. Seeing Clan like that, Koutarou got a little worried. Since Clan wasn't in any sunlight and barely moved, her complexion was getting a little worse. Bothered by that, he wanted to bring her outside.

"That might be true, but you are a princess. If you keep shutting yourself in and ruining your complexion, your citizens will worry."

"My, Bertorion, you speak like a vassal… Did you finally decide to serve me?"

"I have no intentions of serving someone so unhealthy. I'm just worried about your future."

"M-My future!?"

Hearing those words, Clan's face turned red and she began to panic.

"I don't need you to tell me that. By the time I get married, I will take good care of my physical condition!"

"Hm? Marriage? What are you talking about?"

At this point, Koutarou only thought that Clan wouldn't be able to live if she collapsed, but Clan took this in a different way.

"Are you getting married to someone?"

"Kya Kya Kya! N-No I am not! There's no way I'll marry someone!"

Clan blushed so hard even her ears turned red as she intensely shook her head so fast that even her glasses were thrown around.

"Hmm, so you have no intentions of marrying. What a shame."

"…I-I'll kill him… I'll kill this man…"

With her face still red and looking down, Clan's shoulders shook. She wanted to tell Koutarou 'In that case, why don't you marry me.' In the past, Clan had pushed others away to focus on her research all on her own; she was that self-conceited and selfish. There hadn't been anyone else that she had allowed to get as close to her as Koutarou. That's why when she thought of her own future, of her marriage, Koutarou's face naturally appeared in her mind. But she didn't have the courage to say that out loud. Clan was far more pure than her appearance let on.

"Well, that aside, Ruth-san who is a proper citizen of Forthorthe is here too so don't show her too miserable of an appearance."

"T-That aside? …This man just shoved my feelings to the side… I'll kill him… I really will kill him…"

Clan's face was still red and her shoulders continued shaking from frustration and anger. Ruth who was nearby then whispered in a small voice only Clan could hear.

Everyone's Weekend

"…I understand how you must feel, Clan-sama."

Ruth had a wry smile on her face as she whispered.

Ruth had come with Koutarou to visit Clan. When she heard that Koutarou was going to see Clan she offered to come with him. Since Ruth and Clan shared Koutarou's secret, their relationship had been turning to a positive one.

"I'm surprised you can stay sane while you're always hearing this."

"I have already conveyed my feelings to Master…"

Clan and Ruth started talking in secret. Koutarou was busy staring around the laboratory in awe so he didn't hear what the two were talking about.

"So what happened?"

"Nothing remarkable. But every day is full of happiness."

"That doesn't sound like something I could do. I have my own pride after all."

"Pride?"

"One day I will make Bertorion cry while begging 'Please keep me at your side.'"

Clan said so with a disappointed expression.

"Clan-sama…"

Hearing those words, Ruth stifled her voice and began laughing.

"What's the matter, Pardomshiha?"

"N-No, It's nothing… fufu, fufufufu."

Ruth was laughing because the meaning behind Clan's words were practically the same as Theia's. But since Theia and Clan's relationship still had ways to go, Ruth couldn't reveal the reason for why she was laughing.

Part 5

Koutarou took Clan and Ruth with him and left the Cradle. This was because Koutarou wanted Clan to get some sunlight, but he also had another reason. In fact, there was something he wanted to ask of Clan, and that had been part of the reason for why he had come to see her.

"Here I go, Ruth-san."

"Okay. Should I do it like I did before?"

"Please do."

Koutarou and Ruth were both carrying weapons and protection while facing each other.

Koutarou was wearing a blue armor used to control the spaceship, the Blue Knight. In each of his hands was a knight's sword. However, both of the blades were blunted, and Ruth was using a protective barrier so there was no fear of injuries.

Ruth was also wearing an armor designed for combat. Like with Koutarou, it was also powered and it increased Ruth's strength significantly. She was holding a thin sword in her right hand. However, this sword was a little heavier and larger than what she normally used. It was this way to match her increase in strength and to balance her better due to her armor. Of course, this weapon was also blunted.

Koutarou and Ruth had been sparring like this for a while. Koutarou wanted to show Clan how he and Ruth fought.

"Alright."

Koutarou kicked off the ground and dashed forward. His power was increased by the armor and he moved at a speed that showed that the armor wasn't weighing him down. With his right sword ready to swing and his left sword in front of him, he approached Ruth.

"Here he comes."

Ruth took a stance and stood ready to face Koutarou who was rapidly approaching. Her stance at this time was defensive; as she had such a peaceful personality, her stance naturally turned out that way. Her style was to defend and go for counter attacks. However, she was focused even more on defense this time around since Koutarou had asked her to put up a solid defense.

"Phuu."

Koutarou exhaled briefly before swinging the sword in his left hand.

A shrill sound rang out, and before the sound could disappear the sword in his right hand was swung down towards Ruth. However, Ruth was able to dodge this attack by twisting her body.

"Haa!"

However, that wasn't all Ruth did. Using the mobility of her thin sword to the best of its capabilities, Ruth launched an attack at Koutarou. The tip of her sword created a sharp whooshing noise as it cut through the air and headed towards him.

"Uwa!?"

Koutarou kicked off the ground and managed to evade Ruth's attack.

"Chance!"

However, because of that forced movement, a large opening appeared in Koutarou's stance. Ruth went and launched several attacks towards him. Since Ruth was serious, diligent and wanted to show off her good side to Koutarou, she had practiced at great lengths. And her

continuous attack was an elegant one without any wasted movements. All Koutarou could do was bring up his swords to use them as shields.

"Y-You've gotten better, Ruth-san!"

"That's because my teacher was good!"

Koutarou and Ruth's match continued for a while. Ruth was dominant the entire match, using her swift attacks to force Koutarou on the defensive. Based on the fact that the defensive girl was taking the offensive, one could say that she was overwhelming Koutarou.

"Ei."

Ruth easily deflected Koutarou's right sword with a smile on her face. She then closed in and thrust out her left fist. The fist was wrapped in red light as the armor read Ruth's intentions and filled her fist with energy to attack.

"Kuh."

I won't make it at this rate!

Koutarou decided to abandon his left sword and swung out his own left fist. Because of the timing, Koutarou's sword wouldn't make it, so his fist started to fill with electricity and release sparks. This electricity was thanks to Kiriha's gauntlet which had been incorporated into Koutarou's armor.

The two's fists collided and cancelled each other's attacks out. Thanks to that, this attack didn't end their battle, but the two stopped moving.

"You have really improved, Ruth-san."

"Fufufu, that's because I haven't missed a single thing you've said, Master."

"Then I better take care not to say anything strange."

"Aha, you don't have to worry, because I quickly forget about things inconvenient to you, Master."

The two smiled at each other and lowered their weapons. Though their battle hadn't reached a conclusion, what they needed to do had been done.

"…So there you have it, it goes something like this. What do you think, Clan?"

Koutarou returned his right sword to its sheath and picked up the other sword he had dropped. As he put that sword into its sheath, he approached Clan.

"Frankly put, I can't recommend using two swords at the same time in this state."

Clan operated her bracelet while shaking her head. Then several holograms projected by her bracelet appeared in her surroundings. The holograms consisted of footage and sound from Koutarou and Ruth's battle, along with data extracted from their fight.

"I've recorded you fighting with a single sword, holding two swords and only using one and using two swords at the same time… but only the first two uses seem practical. In close combat, just holding two swords is dangerous."

"I thought so."

Koutarou agreed with Clan's answer and nodded his head.

Koutarou wanted to consult Clan about how he should use his swords. Signaltin enchanted with magic and Saguratin infused with Sanae's spiritual energy both had their own unique traits, and he had to think of how he should use them.

In total, Koutarou could think of three different usages.

The first was to keep fighting with a single sword like he had up until now, and then change his sword based on the situation. Though it would take time to switch, the fact that he didn't need to change his fighting style made this an attractive method.

The second way was to hold one sword in each hand, but only using one at a time like the fight against the monster with Sanae a few weeks ago. Back then it was a sort of last resort, but not having to waste time changing weapons was a logical method.

The third way was to dual wield and use both of swords at the same time. Though the difficulty increased significantly, it was the most convenient way to use the swords. In this case, Koutarou would be able to respond to situations flexibly.

Koutarou's ideal was of course to dual wield them, but since he realized how difficult that would be, he had come to consult Clan.

"When I'm wearing the armor, I can't feel the heaviness of the swords, but I end up being swung around by them."

Without the armor, using two swords at once was not realistic. The knight sword was a little too big to be used with one hand and the momentum from swinging one had a great effect on the user. Koutarou figured that he would be alright if he wore the armor, but the results were unsatisfactory. He also wanted to know the reason behind that.

"The problem isn't with the weight you feel, but with the mass. The armor might take the load off the body, but that doesn't change the mass of the sword, so the centrifugal force and inertia are the same. If anything, it will get even worse when you swing even faster with the strengthened power from the armor."

"Clan-sama, does that mean that when attacking with two swords at once, you have to change your technique?"

"Based on the results from the data, that would be the case. Using two knight swords at once would mean you would have to invent a new style of sword fighting. It is not a very realistic proposition."

Using two long swords at the same time meant that their movements would get in the way of one another. On top of that, the mass of the swords would affect Koutarou so he would have to use techniques developed specifically for this.

"If it's just about offensive power, then doing what you two did at the end and using the built-in weapons in your left hands would be far better."

Using two swords at once was unrealistic. In that case, letting go off the sword with one hand and using the weapon built in to the left hand would be better. That was the conclusion Clan reached based on her data.

"I see. If you say it's impossible, then there's no doubting it."

Clan's conclusion was the same as Koutarou's sensation. Having proved this with his own sensations, Koutarou accepted this result.

"I will come up with something regarding how to use the swords."

"…Those words bother me."

Koutarou was satisfied, but Clan was not. Her eyes behind her beloved antique glasses were filled with irritation as she frowned. She looked like a young girl throwing a tantrum.

"What are you getting so angry for?"

"It's not impossible for me! You take that back!"

Everyone's Weekend

Clan couldn't forgive that Koutarou thought there was something she couldn't do.

"If you say it's impossible."

To Clan, those words were the same as she wasn't being trusted.

"But you just said that it wasn't realistic…"

"That was just a generalization!"

Clan reached out her hand towards Koutarou and began to irritatingly poke at his chest with the tip of her finger.

"I will become your master! As if I could allow there to be something impossible for me!"

Clan admitted that Koutarou was the legendary Blue Knight. So in order to become his master, she was prepared to surpass his legend with her skills in science. Right now, she was aiming to become Koutarou's master in both name and reality.

"So can you do it?"

"A foolish question! All you have to do is beg me! To say, 'Oh, Princess Clariossa, please lend me your power!' You have that right!"

"Clan…"

With his arms crossed, Koutarou looked at Clan who had thrown her head back and realized his mistake.

To people that get along well, this might mean to expect good things from the future…

The solution to this problem was far more difficult than the devices Koutarou had asked Clan to make to practice with. That's why Koutarou didn't want to ask for the impossible.

But that might have been a mistake.

Thanks to the invader girls, Koutarou had realized that he tended not to expect anything from others. In other words, Koutarou only requested things from others in a narrower range than what they really could do.

It seems like that was the problem this time around. Koutarou could have expected Clan to solve this problem.

"I'm sorry. It's just as you say."

"You may reflect on your actions to your heart's content."

"But Clan."

"What?"

"I don't want to ask princess Clariossa, but you, Clan. Could you do it, Clan?"

"That…"

At this moment, Clan's expression froze up.

Princess Clariossa and Clan both referred to the same person, but Koutarou was asking Clan. The Blue Knight wasn't asking princess Clariossa. This was a request from a partner that she had gone through hardships with and who hoped to continue to be partners in the future as well.

Clan properly understood the meaning behind those words. That's why her expression soon unfroze and she smiled at Koutarou.

"That much is obvious. Who do you think I am?"

"A slightly sly, stubborn but always reliable girl."

"As long as you know that. Leave it to me, Koutarou."

"Yeah, thanks, Clan."

"Then I'll get to work immediately… fufu, fufufufu…"

Koutarou had said the word sly, but as of late, there hadn't been any slyness in Clan's expressions. And right now, she had such a bright smile she looked like she might break into dance at any moment.

Part 6

Clan's idea was to use the armor's gravity inertia control to control the mass of the swords as needed. If she succeeded, Koutarou should be able to use two swords with the same sense he had been cultivating so far.

However, there were of course many difficulties. Not only did the mass control system for the swords need to derive its data from Koutarou's movements, but the problem with the two swords interfering with one another needed to be taken into consideration as well. Other people might be able to solve each problem separately, but only Clan could solve the incredibly difficult task of solving all these problems at once.

Clan took Koutarou and Ruth back to her laboratory and took several measurements on Koutarou and the armor. She also took the operation data from Ruth's armor. After this, she would throw the data into her computer and calculate the required parameters.

"But still, it won't be possible today or tomorrow."

"I know. I'm not asking for that much."

"I'll also need to perform some adjustments so come back again after a while."

"Yeah."

"Thank you very much."

However, a large amount of time would be needed to calculate those parameters. So Koutarou and Ruth decided to leave the rest to Clan and head home.

"Then I'll see you later, Clan."

"I will take my leave, Clan-sama."

Koutarou lightly waved his hand at Clan while Ruth deeply bowed. That was when Clan sent a questioning glance towards Ruth.

"…Say, Pardomshiha, don't you suspect that I would try to do something with you even giving me access to the Blue Knight?"

Koutarou's armor was originally a part of the controls for the spaceship, the Blue Knight. That's why Clan couldn't touch up on the armor without Koutarou or Ruth, the registered users for the armor, by her side. Clan had only been able to perform repairs to the armor in the past Forthorthe because Koutarou had been with her and given his permission.

But now Koutarou had his life to take care of, so he couldn't stay by Clan's side all this time. So Ruth decided to register Clan as a crew member of the Blue Knight so that she could modify the armor.

Clan wasn't sure why Ruth would do that as if she didn't have a sense of danger.

"Could it be that you wish to perform maintenance on the entire Blue Knight!?"

Ruth's eyes sparkled. There was not a single fiber in her body that believed that Clan would perform an evil deed.

"No! I'm talking about setting up a backdoor into the system or setting up traps on board the ship!"

Ruth's carefree attitude confused Clan. Just a little while ago, she had been Theia and Ruth's enemy.

"Haah… why would you do that? Would it be for a surprise party or something?"

Clan's intentions didn't seem to reach Ruth as she blinked repeatedly and looked with a confused expression at Clan.

"Of course not! Geez! I'm asking if you're not worried that I might eliminate Theiamillis-san to raise my position in the rights to the throne!"

Eventually Clan got annoyed by Ruth's lack of worry. As a result, she directly spoke what she had been insinuating. And Ruth was finally able to understand what Clan was trying to say.

"No, not really."

Ruth shook her head and her short, arranged hair flapped around.

"Why not?"

"That's because right now, you don't wish to become empress through such methods, Clan-sama."

Ruth then put her hands on her chest and smiled at Clan.

"Pardomshiha…"

Having seen Alaia up close, Clan now knew what it meant to be a princess and an empress. At the very least, if she wasn't a princess that the Blue Knight, Koutarou, would accept, she was not suitable to be empress. That's why Clan was planning on winning against Theia fair and square. She wouldn't get in Theia's way, and if needed, she would challenge her up front. If she didn't, she would never be able to become someone that could surpass Alaia.

Ruth had realized this. She had seen this from her behavior and her relationship with Koutarou. Though she might have read Clan's behavior wrongly, she wouldn't do the same with Clan's relationship with Koutarou. Ruth was very confident in her own judgment.

"Clan, you are just thinking too hard about it. I'm always telling you, aren't I?"

Koutarou smiled next to Ruth as well.

"Koutarou…"

When he did, Clan's face turned a little red. She wasn't used to having a man she was close to speak so friendly to her.

"Being so sly, you wouldn't do anything evil that would leave evidence behind, right? You elegantly do evil in a way that no one would find out about. You're not the type that would do something as a registered user. Believe in yourself more."

However, Koutarou's next words instantly inverted Clan's feelings. Her expression turned into one of anger and her face turned even redder as she shouted at Koutarou.

"Quit messing around! As if someone who seeks to become the empress of Forthorthe would trap others! Something like that would—"

"That's right. It's just as you say."

However, Koutarou put his hand on Clan's head before she could finish shouting. And as if praising a child, he tapped her head repeatedly.

"Ah…"

"It's alright, don't worry. Both me and Ruth-san believe in you. The others might not do so yet, but they will eventually. Theia will too."

Koutarou and Ruth smiled and stared at Clan's face.

"A-Auu…"

This caused Clan's face to turn even redder and she turned her eyes down as if to escape.

Clan had asked Ruth her question because she was worried if Ruth really trusted her since they were enemies before. But in the end, it seemed like that worry was for nothing. And Koutarou had called her sly on purpose to get her angry and draw out her true intentions. Having realized that, Clan was unable to raise her head from relief and embarrassment.

"Clan, believe in yourself more."

"…I'll hold off on killing you for now, Koutarou…"

Clan mumbled as she put her hands on her chest. As she did, she could feel her own heat and elevated heart beat.

I would bet my life on this feeling… but to think this kind of feeling was resting inside of me…

In the past, Clan had only thought of others as being disposable after their use had expired. However, having stepped out of her laboratory on a whim, she had learned the importance of it. Clan herself thought it was strange, but now she loved others and the world. And Clan felt happy about it.

"Hmm? What was that?"

"It was nothing."

Clan spun around and showed her back to Koutarou and Ruth and headed towards a shelf.

"…Pardomshiha, let me give you something good."

"Clan-sama?"

"Here they are, take these."

Clan then pulled out something from the shelf and brought it to Ruth.

Clan was holding two metallic sticks in her hand. They were just about the same size as batons used in relays.

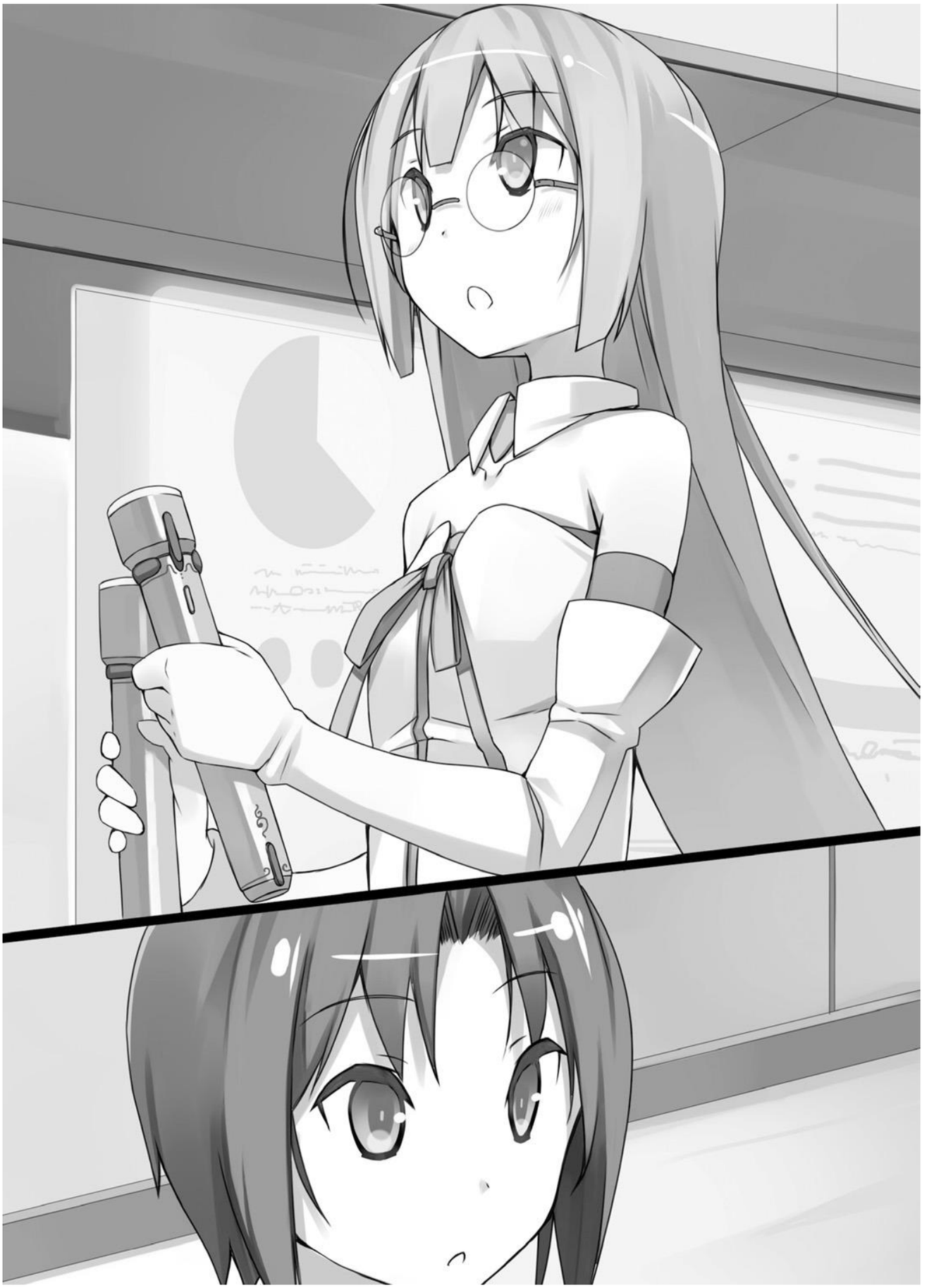
"These are… beam swords, correct?"

By emitting a beam from the stick, a sword is made; they were so called beam swords. She knew that, but Ruth couldn't understand why she had been given the swords and she looked at Clan with a confused expression.

"Yes. As a sign of our friendship, I will give you these."

As Clan nodded and smiled, Koutarou tapped Clan on the head again.

Everyone's Weekend



"Oh… You do have a good side to you Clan."

Koutarou knew very well what the meaning behind this present was.

"Auu…"

Clan's face turned red once more and she turned her face away from Koutarou. She really wasn't used to receiving compliments from people close to her.

"What do you mean, Master?"

Ruth asked not Clan who had fallen silent, but Koutarou. She still didn't understand the meaning behind the present.

"Actually, these are the swords Lord Flairhan used. You know, the swords of light that appeared in legend."

"These are!? Is that true!?"

The moment Ruth heard Koutarou's explanation, her eyes shot open and she stared in astonishment. The two beam swords in her hand held a very big meaning to the Pardomshiha family. They were the weapons of one of the characters that appeared in the legend of the Blue Knight, Flairhan Pardomshiha, that she had used in the final battle of the coup d'etat.

"Yes, I guarantee it."

"To think they actually existed…"

Ruth had a tight grip around the swords as her eyes moistened.

The two swords of light that could cut through anything. Since they were described as magic swords, historians doubted they even existed. But in reality they did, and they were now in Ruth's hands. Holding the weapons of her greatest ancestor in her hands, Ruth was moved to tears.

"W-Well, it's not something that can be made public, and there's no point in me holding onto them. So you take them."

"Thank you very much, Clan-sama! I will take great care of them!"

"W-What an exaggerated reaction, they are just beam swords…"

Attempting to escape from Ruth who was repeatedly bowing her head deeply, Clan returned to her desk.

"…Hey, Clan, let me teach you something."

Seeing Clan like that, Koutarou gave off a small smile.

"…W-What?"

Clan moved just her eyes to look at Koutarou. She was too embarrassed to turn her face towards him.

"Playing the villain is not possible for you anymore. How about you realize who you are now?"

"…T-That's none of your business! You're always calling me sly!"

"If I don't, I'd have to treat you like a princess."

"Then do so!"

"Are you seriously saying that?"

"Uuhh… Not really…"

Clan became flustered, adjusted her glasses and grabbed the hems of her skirt.

"I am your partner, and accomplice, then there's also… uhm…"

"Clan."

"W-What?"

"Thank you for everything. You're a great help."

"Wha!?"

Koutarou's next words made Clan's eyes pop out.

"I hope you can take care of me in the future as well."

"…Uh… Auu…"

Clan tried to retort, but she was unable to form words. Shortly afterwards, Clan glanced at Koutarou through her glasses with a grudge in her eyes. And then she finally managed to squeeze out of a few words.

"…Geez… I really will kill you…"

As Koutarou looked at Clan's eyes he thought to himself–

"Yeah. Come kill me whenever you want. How about a day when Ruth prepares some snacks?"

"Idiot…"

–that he was really happy to have been able to reconcile with Clan.

Part 7

At first, the room in which the girl known as Aika Maki lived in was very empty.

She would only be staying at this city until she had completed her objective, that was why she hadn't kept anything but the most necessary things in her room. It was a room similar to a business man's out-of-town hotel room. And without any superfluous decorations, it didn't look like a room a girl in her teens lived in.

However, after the new year began, Maki's room had started getting brighter.

Clothes of many vivid colors were hung up on the clothes rack, and by the bed was a dressing table that wasn't there last year. In the dressing table were tools for make-up, though few in number. Moreover, her plain table now had a checkered tablecloth over it, and next to it lay two large cushions. And wallpapers now covered the concrete wall. There were also many other small changes.

It was no longer the empty room of the past. In a few months, the room had changed, and while it was still simple, it was changing to a room fitting for a teenage girl.

"Which one should I try next… A little too much exposure would be embarrassing, so how about this white one… But won't it be seen as childish with it being so frilly…"

Maki was standing in her colorful room all alone while holding her own fashion show. She alternated between her newly bought clothes and her favorite clothes while trying to decide what to wear the coming weekend.

"If I match it with this white ribbon, it will probably look cute, so even if it's a little childish… but I will be getting on rides, so if I wear clothes with too many accessories it might get in the way…"

Clothes, purse, accessories and make-up.

Maki didn't have a lot of each to choose from, but there were countless combinations, and she was trying to find the best combination. Because of that, she had been working hard on this since she came home.

"But… all the girls around Satomi-kun leave such a strong impression, so I should pick something flashing… No, no, I shouldn't force it…"

In fact, Maki had an appointment to go out to play tomorrow. She would be going out with some classmates she got along with to visit an amusement park. The reason why she was holding her own fashion show was because she wanted to show off her cute side to one of them. She wanted to attract the attention of that person, and have him praise her.

"My underwear… I should just wear normal underwear… He won't be seeing those tomorrow… No, he might, depending on the attraction… then… I should pick these flashy ones… Aah, it's too early for these!"

Having imagined something embarrassing, Maki grabbed a nearby cushion and buried her face into it. It was obvious what Maki wanted from her beloved person, but being a beginner at love, she didn't know the best method to achieve her desired result. That's why she continued to bury her face into the cushion. Her worries were deep.

"…What am I doing…"

After doing that for a while, Maki suddenly stopped. While still hugging her cushion, she looked up at the ceiling.

"…To think I had such girlish feelings inside me…"

Maki couldn't help but be confused.

Everyone's Weekend

Ever since she had been a child, she had lived a severe life and had been involved in fierce battles. During that time, she only thought of outsmarting others and using them. That's why she had been detached from feelings like love, to the point where she started believing that she could never experience such feelings.

However, her meeting with a certain boy had changed Maki's life.

If it's with him, I'm sure we can fill each other's solitude. We can save each other…

Her exchange with the boy had woken up such feelings in Maki. And by the time Maki realized her feelings, her surroundings completely changed. Everything around her looked like it was sparkling. Everything she did was funny. Having someone support her and supporting someone herself made Maki's life brighter. It was most likely the first glimpse of hope in her life.

"…I… could die for Satomi-kun's sake… and I used to think that only fools died for others…"

Maki had found value in her life for the first time ever. It was the first time she wished that these days would continue like this forever. Of course, since she had been caught up in battles since she was a child, it took time for her to admit those feelings. She also tried to play it off using various excuses, like saying it was necessary for her mission. But now, her feelings had grown to the point where she could no longer hide from them.

However, that deviated from the goals of Darkness Rainbow which she was a part of. Darkness Rainbow's style was to fulfill your own wishes using the power of magic. However, Maki didn't want to force her way with magic any further. She only wished to continue living out these days. That meant that her Dark Navy self was being lost. However, she was not yet aware of that.

"Okay, let's do this. I have to draw Satomi-kun's attention somehow!"

Maki stood up, let go of the cushion and faced her clothes again.

Like this, Maki lived her days like a normal girl, not knowing what her actions really meant.

"…It looks like you're blending in well, Maki."

However, the time those days would end had come. It was as sudden as when they had first started. And the one to let Maki know the end had come was the voice of someone she knew very well.

"You've even gotten a lot more feminine in the time I haven't seen you."

When Maki hurriedly turned around in the direction of the voice, she saw a woman in an indigo robe very similar to her own.

"Maya-sama!?"

It was the previous Dark Navy, and Maki's master.

Part 8

Maya was injured in a battle against Nana several years ago and allowed for her disciple to succeed her.

Though the wound she had received wasn't fatal, it was serious enough for her to lose several parts of her body. As a result, Maya was reduced to a state where she couldn't even walk, let alone fight any further. Of course, accompanying the loss of the parts of her body, she also lost a lot of her magical power. That's why Maya's life as a soldier ended.

"Maya-sama, is your body alright!?"

"Yes. I found a superb doctor."

That Maya was now standing in front of Maki on her own two legs. She had hidden her presence to the point that she could sneak up right next to Maki. In other words, it meant her life as a soldier had been recovered. That's why Maki was left speechless from surprise.

"That said, I haven't fully healed yet, so as part of my rehabilitation I came to cheer you on."

While she spoke, Maya formed a fist with her right hand in front of Maki.

Amazing… such an elaborate artificial arm. Just where did she…?

Maki held her breath as she stared at Maya's right arm.

Maya's original right arm had been blown away during her battle with Nana, so her right arm should be artificial. However, it was expertly crafted, making it hard to tell whether it was artificial just by looking at it. Its texture was almost exactly the same as the rest of her body, and only some lines and markings on the arm hinted that it was artificial. However, simply claiming that it was a tattoo would be enough to convince people. Its movements were also very natural, and it looked like a real arm. It even had the same wasted movements found only in living beings incorporated in it.

An artificial arm as elaborate as this could not have been made in Folsaria. The same was true for modern science in Japan. That's why Maki realized that Maya must have had a very special cooperator.

"I also came to brag about my rejuvenated appearance to you."

"Maya-sama…"

Artificial body parts of the same craft as her arm made up for the other parts of Maya's lost body. Her skin that had been mostly burned had been replaced with artificial material. As a result, Maya looked like she had gotten more than ten years younger. Maya was more than ten years older than Maki, but now they looked like they could be sisters.

"But you don't have to worry. I don't have any intentions on retaking the title of Dark Navy from you. Sadly, my magic capabilities are the same."

The only weak point of her artificial body was that it couldn't be filled with magic power. Magicians focused the magical power in their bodies into a single point to cast spells. However, this artificial body didn't have the capability to create magical power. Though it was possible to supplement her body, it wasn't possible to supplement her magical power. Because of that, Maya's magical power was now at the same level as a standard magician. She didn't have the power needed to be a top leader of Darkness Rainbow.

"No, I would never be worried… I am glad to see you fine, Maya-sama."

Maya is Maki's master. Seeing her master so healthy made her happy, and she naturally formed a smile.

"…You've changed, Maki. The you in the past would have been more cautious… could this be confidence from getting stronger?"

Seeing Maki like that, Maya smiled happily. But seeing her master's expression, Maki froze up instead.

Oh no, I acted like I would next to Satomi-kun…!

Ever since she had realized her own feelings, Maki began to spend her days happily. She no longer hurt others or doubted their motives. They were days not filled with hostility, but with friendship and love.

However, the original Dark Navy wasn't like that. Not only was she hostile towards the magical girls from Rainbow Heart, but power struggles occurred within Darkness Rainbow as well. Her everyday was filled with malice and hostility. Spending her life like that caused her heart to close off. The Maki of the past, the magical girl Dark Navy, had such a frozen and closed off heart.

I better make sure I don't get suspected or Satomi-kun will be in danger!

Having realized the change within her heart, Maki hurriedly gathered up the negative feelings within her. She didn't have much malice left within her, but for better or for worse, she had a sense of danger and anxiety. Imagining the person she loved in danger; those feelings swelled up and filled her chest.

"…It has been quite some time since I started naming myself as Dark Navy. I can't stay as your poor disciple forever."

Those gathered ill feelings barely managed to recreate her mask as Dark Navy.

"That's true. I'm sorry, Dark Navy."

Fortunately, Maya didn't suspect Maki.

Darkness Rainbow was a gathering of people without concern to begin with, and even if there was a change, one would suspect it was because of a mission or a plot. Maya had noticed a small change in Maki, but she thought it was just due to her objectives in this place. Or it could have been a plot to make use of Maya. Either way, she thought of it as something perfectly normal.

In Darkness Rainbow, people used others or are used themselves. The bond between master and disciple was nothing more than that.

"No, there is no need to apologize…"

Maki smiled without letting anything on, but in reality she was greatly shook.

…Just a while ago I was like this…

Maki could see a glimpse of her past self in Maya. She saw someone who didn't look for bonds with others and only thought of using others and of nothing being used herself. Seeing that, Maki couldn't help but feel fear that her beloved person would be attacked by Maya. And that image greatly shook her.

I have to protect him… I have to protect Satomi-kun from my darkness…

This city had changed Maki a lot, but the darkness and past she once carried with her had changed its appearance and shown up in front of Maki as Maya. Now, Maki's beloved person was now exposed to that threat. Her own existence threatened the existence of her beloved, and that gave Maki an unbearable pain.

Part 9

Maya wasn't the only one from Folsaria to pay a visit to Maki. Once Maki and Maya's greetings were over, the other two appeared in Maki's room. These two also had magical girl outfits similar to Maki's, but their colors were different: dark red and dark green. They were Maki's allies that went by the names Dark Crimson and Dark Green.

"Maki, you've gotten very girly in the short time we haven't seen each other."

The girl in the red outfit, Dark Crimson, looked at Maki's clothes spread out throughout the room and smiled.

Dark Crimson had an active and unyielding personality. She only wanted to get stronger and fight powerful foes. Her frame of mind was similar to that of a martial artist. She strived to become the strongest magical girl and trained hard day and night. She specialized in energy type offensive magic.

Because of that personality, she didn't care much for being feminine. Dark Crimson had no makeup on her and her hair was unkempt, which moved as if it was flames. She had also removed the parts of her outfit that made it hard to move in, so its design was different. She was clean, but not very feminine. That was the kind of girl Dark Crimson was.

Dark Crimson felt a sense of closeness to Maki, who lacked almost as much femininity as her. Maki hated feigning who she really was, so she never wore makeup or fancy clothes. But that Maki had now changed, and to Dark Crimson, it made for good material to tease her.

"I am only doing it out of necessity."

Maki frowned as she said that. Since she hated lies, this wasn't one. To the current Maki, being feminine was necessary.

"Well, I guess. There's no way Maki would do this because she wanted to… But, just thinking about it makes me laugh."

However, Dark Crimson interpreted it differently from Maki. She didn't think Maki wanted to be feminine herself, but that she was reluctantly doing it because she had to do so for her mission.

"If you want to laugh just go ahead and do so."

"T-Then I'll take you up on your word. Ahahahaha!"

Of course, Maki didn't correct that misunderstanding. There was no reason to reveal the truth and ruin her position. And since she wasn't doing it reluctantly, she wasn't particularly mortified.

I understand how you feel, Crimson… Even I myself find it funny…

In fact, Maki was happy that Dark Crimson had misunderstood. While maintaining her unhappy expression, she felt a sense of relief that Dark Crimson was putting that dangerous topic aside.

"By the way, Green, what brought the two of you here?"

Maki left Dark Crimson laughing and turned to Dark Green who was standing next to her.

The girl wearing a dark green outfit was the shortest of the seven top leaders of Darkness Rainbow. Since she was standing next to Dark Crimson, the tallest of the seven, there was more than a head's difference in height.

"…We got free from our previous jobs at the same time Maya-san recovered, so we came to take a look at how it's going."

Dark Green responded in a very proper manner as she adjusted her glasses. It wasn't just her height, but even her personality was the opposite of Dark Crimson's. Her specialty was also the

opposite, as she focused on fortune telling and illusions. She was a magician skilled in information gathering and interference.

"I said that I was fine alone."

Dark Green's words made Maya drop her shoulders. As someone with a lot of pride and confidence, Maya wasn't very happy being told that she needed protection, even though she had just recovered.

"I believe in Maya-san's abilities as well, but I don't believe as much in that new body."

"I can agree with that."

Maya herself aside, it wasn't easy to place trust in the technology that supplemented parts of Maya's body. Maya felt the same herself and didn't complain any further.

"…So the three of us have gone on ahead. This time, our goal is to scout the surroundings of that magic power for our an all-out attack, and if possible, seize it for ourselves."

Darkness Rainbow was after the magic power that gathered in room 106. They prioritized claiming that magic power, but in truth, they only wanted it as a means to complete their main goal, which was to destroy Rainbow Heart.

For that goal, Crimson and Green had received different missions as well. And due to sheer coincidence, Maya had returned to service with a new body just as they had finished their missions, so they came to Kitsushouharukaze city together.

Their true battle, the decisive battle against Rainbow Heart, lay beyond. If they were able to obtain the concentrated magic power, their position in the battle would be more advantageous. That was the reason behind Maki's reinforcement.

"What about the other four?"

"Purple-san is working on restraining Rainbow Heart. Yellow-san is making a weapon in preparation for the battle. Blue-san is still busy training her disciple, and Orange-san is helping her."

"…So we're almost there…"

One year ago, in their battle against Rainbow Nana, five of the seven leaders of Darkness Rainbow had sustained severe injuries. As a result, Crimson, Orange and Yellow needed long-term treatment, while Blue and Green had to retire and give their titles to their disciples. That's why the Green standing in front of Maki was a different person than the Green from one year ago.

However, their situation had improved during the year and they had now started taking action again. Like Maki said, the decisive battle against Rainbow Heart was closing in, and the preliminary battle would be when they seize the magic power in room 106.

"It is obvious that whichever side controls this magic power during the final battle will have an advantage. So this is where it starts…"

Maki mumbled to herself with a severe expression as she realized the situation.

I have to keep Satomi-kun away from this battle…

There was a massive quantity of magic power in room 106. It was in a league of its own when compared to the other artifacts, powerful magical items that Maki and the others had gathered. It was suspected to be related to Signaltin and Encyclopedia, but Maki felt something else that kept her from being certain of that. And in the center of it all was her beloved. If she left this

situation be, it was obvious that her beloved would become the center of the conflict. That's why Maki racked her head thinking of ways to avoid that.

"The ideal would be if we could seize it now, but if worse comes to worst, we have to seal it before the decisive battle."

Maya continued on from where Maki left off. Darkness Rainbow's absolute priority was to make sure that Rainbow Heart didn't use this magic power themselves. Seizing the magic power came second.

"Then let's blow away the building around the magic power. If we clear the surroundings, they can't make any moves either."

Listening to Maya's words, Crimson proposed a rough plan. The plan was that by destroying Corona House, neither side would be able to use the magic power. It was an unwritten law that magicians concealed magic from the society while on Earth. By removing the building, it would become impossible to do things in secret. Crimson's idea was simple and rough, but quite effective.

"We can't."

However, Maki immediately rejected this plan.

"Why?"

Crimson was dissatisfied as she had confidence in her plan. Maki continued on in an attempt to convince her.

"Then we can't use the magic power either. And then there's the problem with rebuilding it; we can aim to destroy the building later."

Even if they destroyed the building, there wouldn't be in any point if was rebuilt before their decisive battle. The same was true for sealing the magic power. If they were going to do it, they should do so just before the battle. Their focus right now should be on seizing the magic power.

"So easygoing…"

Hearing Maki's words, Crimson frowned. She hated trouble, but since she understood what Maki meant, she didn't say anything else.

"Green, what do you think?"

Instead, Crimson asked for Green's opinion. Green was the calmest and most intelligent of the four in the room. That's why Crimson was going to follow Green's opinion.

"Hmm… In order not to waste all of Navy-san's efforts up until now, let's not blow up any buildings this time."

Green slightly tilted her head and indicated the clothes lying scattered around the room.

"Well, okay."

Crimson easily gave up on arguing when Green supported Maki's opinion. She wasn't good at discussions to begin with, and was satisfied if she got to fight against strong opponents.

Thank you, Green…

If Corona House was blown up, its residents wouldn't escape unscathed. Since Maki wanted to protect one of the residents, she was grateful that Green agreed with her.

"…So Maki, how about that boy in question?"

Crimson who was hasty, pushed the discussion forward. Maki answered Crimson's question while feeling relief.

"Our relationship is going well. I'm sure he would think of me as a good friend."

"Hmm, for someone who hates dealing with others, you've worked hard."

"…Thanks."

"Maki, could you take just that boy somewhere else?"

That was when Maya intervened. She had heard reports of the boy who used a powerful artifact. It would be for the best if he would join their cause, but if not, they needed to separate him from the magic power. It was common practice to pull the most difficult opponent away from a fight.

And looking at everything that had happened, it looked as if the artifact he had made use of the magic power in room 106. As such, it was thought to be inevitable to keep him away until they could seize control of the magic power.

"I wasn't the one that planned it, but I actually have plans on going out with him tomorrow."

"Then try to stall him for as long as you can. I am interested in him, so I actually wanted to meet him, but I have more important business to attend to."

Maya smiled as she insinuated something.

Maya-sama is after Yurika…

Maya was planning on eliminating Rainbow Heart's arc-wizard, Yurika, while Maki was keeping the boy away.

Having realized her master's intentions upon seeing her smile, Maki nodded firmly.

"I understand."

Maki had no objections, things were developing in an ideal direction for her.

I can protect Satomi-kun if it's tomorrow…

The person Maki wanted to protect and the person Maya regarded as dangerous was the same person. Maki didn't just want to protect Koutarou from physical harm, but she also wanted to separate him from evil all together.

That person isn't someone who is used to fighting. He shouldn't fight…

The boy was talented at fighting, and the weapon he used was powerful, but that didn't mean that fighting suited him. Maki believed that he was the kind of person that hurt himself every time he hurt others, and that he would eventually be unable to bear that pain and meet a sad end.

That's why Maki wanted to keep the boy away from the battle in order to protect him. She loved the boy the way he was now. He was neither a soldier nor a hero, just a normal boy that was a little out of it. But Maki loved that boy who held the same kind of solitude as she did. She loved him more than anything.

"Wouldn't it be dangerous with just Navy-san? The artifact of the person in question is supposedly very powerful…"

Green furrowed her eyebrows. Maki hadn't taken up the offensive because the person in question was very strong. That's why having Maki alone with him tomorrow should be a big risk.

"I'll be fine, Green. I've been working for this up until today."

Maki had no intentions of fighting with the boy. She also didn't think that he would attack her. She didn't think there would be any danger even if she was alone. However, saying that she would be fine wasn't enough to satisfy Green.

"However, if it does develop into a fight then, you might not be able to hold him back— Oh?"

But as she spoke, Green noticed something and made an astonished expression. After staring at Maki for a moment, she smiled.

"…I see, so that's how it is."

"Eh?"

Maki wasn't following what Green meant. So she showed an expression of confusion.

"Navy-san, you've already made a contract with a devil or something, haven't you? That's why you'll be fine on your own… I finally understand."

In contrast to Maki, Green seemed satisfied and nodded.

A magician could see the magical power surrounding people. Green specialized in fortune telling and information gathering, so she was exceptionally good at it. Because of that, she was able to see concealed magic that normal magicians would overlook.

Green had spotted a special type of magical power within Maki. It was a kind of magic that compelled two intelligent creatures to help one another.

To magicians, this was called a contract or engage, and there were primarily two reasons to use this. One was to contract a demon to serve the magician, a so called familiar. The other was when making a deal with a creature of a higher existence than the magician, and forming a contract where they will help once specific conditions are met.

When forming contracts with powerful beings, more complex conditions tended to be used. And Green had spotted a complex contract within Maki. That's why Green assumed that Maki had made a contract with a devil, a demon of very high level.

"Wha…"

Maki was at a loss for words.

A contract? There's no such… to begin with, with who? When?

Maki had no recollection of forming a contract with someone, so she was confused by what Green had pointed out, to the point where she suspected that Green might just be jesting.

"So Green, what kind of contract is it?"

While Maki was puzzled by the situation, Crimson muscled her way into the conversation.

If Maki had made a contract with someone, it would mean that she had gotten a big power-up. To Crimson who valued strength over all, this was an interesting topic.

"It's an equal and persistent contract with a mental connection between the parties… and there's no limit to the mutual assistance. It's almost like they're one and the same. It's quite a drastic contract…"

"Maki… are you planning on marrying that devil or something?"

Having heard about the details of Maki's contract, Crimson showed an amazed expression and started laughing. The contract was far stronger and complex than what she had imagined. Simply put, it was a contract that bound their hearts and exposed their very existence to one another, until death do they apart, they would continue to protect one another. It was such a complex contract that Crimson couldn't help but laugh and compare it to marriage. It also meant that since it was so complex, she must have made a contract with someone very powerful. Crimson could imagine just how much Maki powered up from that contract, and in that sense, she couldn't help but laugh.

Marriage…?

When Green mentioned that word, a certain boy appeared in Maki's mind.

"Ah…"

That was when Maki realized that there was one person that fit Green's description of a contract. But that thing greatly shook her up.

But… that's… impossible…

If that really was the truth, everything that Maki believed might have been fake.

"What kind of guy is it? Tell us, Maki."

Interested by Maki being so shaken up, Crimson closed in on her and pushed further. Crimson simply believed that Maki had gotten a power-up so there was no deeper meaning in her action.

"T-That's…"

"Just leave it at that, Crimson. Even if we're allies, it's against the rules to investigate each other's abilities."

Maki had been unable to answer and felt her face getting pale. That was when her master, Maya, gave her a helping hand.

It was the rule that the members of Darkness Rainbow didn't report each action they took. So pushing Maki to reveal the contract was a violation of that rule.

"…Haah… we finally got to an interesting topic…"

Crimson quickly stepped back. She sighed regretfully, but she easily gave up. Crimson only wanted to take a look at the creature Maki had contracted, but it was also true that this would put Maki at a disadvantage. So Crimson thought that Maya's words were justifiable.

"Green, you too."

"Yes, Maya-san. And I'm sorry, Navy-san…"

Green politely bowed her head as she apologized for selfishly revealing that Maki had formed a contract.

"…No, that's okay…"

Maki forgave Green, but her mind was in a different place.

"S-Satomi-kun, I… I… "

Her body trembled as unease seeped out from the bottom from her heart.

Just a few moments ago, Maki had been leaping for joy as she was cheerfully trying to pick out what clothes to wear for tomorrow.

I… just what… are these feelings…

However, there was no joy within her now. The solitude and despair that had disappeared began invading her again.

Evening in Room 106

Part 1

Friday, April 23

Ruth and Koutarou were walking arm in arm. As they did, the space between them disappeared. Brushing up close together, they walked down the residential area wrapped in twilight. They were on their way back from Clan's spaceship to Corona House.

"Master, it has gotten warmer, hasn't it?"

Ruth smiled with her cheek resting on Koutarou's shoulder. She was looking at the night sky of the early summer and the first star of the evening. The calendar having passed spring meant brighter nights were upon them.

"If it's warm then why not let go?"

"Geez… you always try to separate like that, Master…"

"…Sorry. I'm not used to it…"

When the two were alone, Ruth would call Koutarou 'Master.' As of late, she would also start to link her arm with his. These were all Ruth's desires.

"I think I have the right to stick to you from time to time as well."

"Ruth-san, you're always so diligent and serious, so… it's a bit embarrassing…"

"Fufufu, please get used to it. Normally, Master has the right to freely make use of my mind and body…"

Ruth had been feeling that she was the only one missing out on physical contact with Koutarou.

Sanae had been hanging on Koutarou since she was a ghost, and she continued doing so after regaining her body. Theia's relation with Koutarou was fierce, both in the past and present. Since Yurika lived her life so sloppily, Koutarou constantly had to follow up on her. And Kiriha lived to play pranks on Koutarou.

Looking at it like that, because of Ruth's serious personality, she had been missing out on contact with Koutarou. Bothered by that, she wanted to at least stick to him while it was just the two of them. If Koutarou were to refuse her, he would feel like he was only rejecting her, so he had no choice but to accept her desires.

"But… if you really don't like it… please say so… that is not my intention…"

Just saying those words was enough for the smile to disappear from Ruth. She didn't want to trouble Koutarou for real.

"If I really didn't like it, it wouldn't bother me."

Koutarou on the other, started smiling as he spoke.

A normal person can probably do this without any resistance…

Thanks to the girls around him, Koutarou had realized the psychological fault he carried.

Koutarou didn't expect much from others; that's why he unconsciously tried to get away from linking his arm with Ruth. In other words, he didn't expect to form a deep bond with someone.

But Koutarou felt that wouldn't do. And while it might be hard to change his personality right away, he felt like he should change it little by little.

"Then… I will wait."

"Eh?"

Evening in Room 106

“Her highness and I will always wait for you. Until the day when master can accept us…”

As Ruth said that while still leaning on Koutarou, she put more force into the arm linked with Koutarou’s. While he couldn’t see her expression, the warmth coming through Ruth’s arms conveyed the depth of her feelings.

“Why would you go so far…”

“That’s because… we want to save you and become happy.”

If Koutarou had just been the Blue Knight of legend, Ruth probably wouldn’t have loved him this much.

She loved Koutarou because he was imperfect. It was because she wasn’t just being protected, but she could protect him as well.

“…That is what I think love is.”

Ruth looked up at Koutarou and narrowed her eyes. As she did, the gentle light in her eyes shot straight into Koutarou’s heart. That light then broke down another piece of something hard within his heart.

“…Ruth-san.”

With his heart a little lighter, Koutarou spoke to Ruth.

“I don’t want you to tell this to anyone else, but…”

“Yes, Master.”

Ruth quietly nodded without changing her expression.

“There are times when… I think of Ruth-san and everyone else as angels or something similar.”

That was Koutarou’s true feelings. The most gratitude he could ever show to the girls that treated him so well despite his many flaws.

“You are wrong, Master.”

However, Ruth shook her head at these words. But her eyes remained as gentle as before.

“We are just human. Because… if we really were angels, we wouldn’t think to fall in love with anyone, would we?”

“Ru…”

Hearing that, Koutarou was at a loss for words.

“…We are just normal humans that love you and want to be loved.”

“…”

In the end, Koutarou wasn’t able to say a word.

It’s things like those that make you look like angels…

As he was being stared at by Ruth’s gentle eyes, the best he could do was mumble inside of his mind.

Evening in Room 106

Evening in Room 106

Evening in Room 106

Part 2

As Koutarou and Ruth returned to Corona House, they were greeted by a bizarre sight. Seeing that, the two opened their eyes wide in surprise.

“Kyaaa!?”

“Sanae!?”

It was the sight of Sanae collapsed in front of room 106. She was lying down on the ground with her face pressed up against the door, as if she had tried to break through the door with her face.

“It’s okay, Ruth-san. It’s the usual thing.”

Koutarou lightly touched Ruth’s head as she screamed and held onto his arm. Ruth then timidly looked up. There were tears forming in her eyes.

“…I-I can’t get used to this no matter how many times I see it…”

“Really now, that Sanae… I keep telling her…”

Having realized the situation, Ruth felt relieved and let go of Koutarou’s arm. And as Koutarou complained, he approached the collapsed Sanae.

“Eyup.”

She was unconscious, and her body was completely limp. As a result, Koutarou had a hard time lifting Sanae up.

“Master.”

Ruth opened the door for Koutarou.

“Thank you.”

Koutarou entered room 106 carrying Sanae. As he did, he could hear the sound of the TV. A person that had come home before him was watching TV.

“She really is…”

Feeling a bit of strength leave his body, Koutarou headed towards the inner room. When he entered the room, he was welcomed with a magnificent transformation scene of a magical girl on the TV, and the back of a ghost.

“The magical girl of love and courage! Love Love Heart!”

“It’s finally here!”

“Don’t give me that!”

Koutarou struck the back of the head of the ghost, Sanae.

“Auu… Ah, welcome home, Koutarou.”

The ghost Sanae pressed the power switch on the remote and turned to Koutarou. The magical girl on the TV disappeared. Sanae had been watching the episodes of the magical girl show that she had missed while she had lost her memories that Yurika had recorded for her.

“Sanae, how many times do I have to tell you? Don’t leave your body lying around.”

“Ah, you’re right.”

That was when Sanae realized that she had escaped her own body, she blushed slightly as she apologized to Koutarou.

“I’m sorry, Koutarou. My old habit just got the better of me…”

Evening in Room 106

Sanae had recovered her body, but when she tried to pass through the door like she had as a ghost, her body was left on the outside.

“If the neighbors see your body like that, there’ll be an uproar.”

“I understand, I’ll be careful.”

Sanae hadn’t done it on purpose, but she obediently reflected on her actions. Sanae was the one who would be troubled if nobody could stay in the room because an incident occurred.

“Then that’s good… Here, your body.”

Koutarou presented Sanae’s body that he had been carrying to her ghost form. However, she shook her head and pointed towards the wall with the window.

“I don’t need it. Leave it over there. I’ll put it on later.”

“Wear it properly. You’re taking up space for two and getting in the way.”

“Geez, how could you say that this bundle of adorable, Sanae-chan is in the way!? Isn’t it just more of a profit having two of me!?”

“One is fine. The room is already small.”

“But, if I wear it now, my forehead will definitely hurt.”

Sanae pointed to her body’s forehead. It was swollen and red, and looked quite painful.

“…Ah geez.”

It looked painful to Koutarou as well, so he carried Sanae’s body to the wall while complaining.

“That’s right!”

Sanae came up with a good idea and clapped her hands together.

“As a thanks, you can touch my boobs! I’ll forgive you.”

“As if I would!”

Sanae thought it was a brilliant idea, but Koutarou instantly rejected her.

“You joker. You know you want to touch them ~ Koutarou-chan~, you don’t have to hold back~”

“What’s the fun of touching someone without anything inside.”

“…Is that how it is?”

“I don’t know about others, but at least I’m that way. If you don’t wear Sanae-san, it’s not much different from touching a doll.”

Sanae’s personality was still not fully merged. The ghost Sanae’s personality appears when she is with Koutarou and the others, and when she’s not, the personality of Sanae-san that had been in the hospital is on the surface. And when neither of them are inside her body, it’s not much different from a doll.

“Hmm… I feel like I’ve learned something new.”

“Then wear it.”

“No way. The forehead will hurt.”

“Okay, okay.”

Koutarou put down Sanae’s body by the wall while smiling wryly. At the same time, he fixed her clothes that had gotten disheveled.

“Thanks, Koutarou.”

Evening in Room 106

“You better put it on after a little while.”

“Okay.”

Sanae energetically nodded and looked back towards the TV to continue watching her anime.

“Geez…”

Koutarou looked at Sanae’s body by the wall and the Sanae sitting in front of the TV before dropping his shoulders and heading towards the tea table in the middle of the room. That was when his eyes met with a girl sitting there.

“What’s wrong, Theia? You’re making a strange face.”

“Ah, no, it’s…”

Theia had both her hands pushed against her cheeks and was staring at Koutarou. But when her eyes met with Koutarou’s, her face was dyed red and she averted her eyes. Theia kept her mouth shut and didn’t say anything. Koutarou wondered what she was doing and sat down next to her.

“Your highness, it won’t be conveyed if it’s only in your mind.”

“Y-Yes…”

However, after being told by Ruth who was with her, Theia glanced at Koutarou. She then looked down at her chest before opening her mouth.

“…Pleb.”

“What?”

“Uhm, I recalled something when I overheard you and Sanae speaking.”

Theia then stopped speaking for a moment and looked at Koutarou’s face. And after confirming that he wasn’t laughing, she continued.

“When we first met, you said something, remember? You said ‘Even I have the right to choose which breasts I fondle’…”

“Yeah…”

Hearing Theia’s words, Koutarou thought back to that time. Back then, Koutarou and unexpectedly touched Theia’s breasts. And as Theia criticized him, he responded with those words.

“…Something like that happened.”

Koutarou started feeling nostalgic and looked towards the wall the furthest into the room that led to the Blue Knight. On that day, Theia had appeared from the wall.

Back then, Koutarou couldn’t imagine that the day would come when he and Theia could speak calmly like this to one another. They were quite immature back then; that was how Koutarou felt as he smiled and thought back to their past selves.

“So… I want you listen without laughing, but…”

Hearing those words, Koutarou turned back to look in the direction of the voice. There, he saw a Theia who had grown a little bigger compared to last year. And with her eyes still turned away, she continued squeezing out words.

“I-I was wondering… if you still think the… same way…”

What does Koutarou think of her breasts? After listening to Koutarou and Sanae, that’s what Theia had started thinking about.

Evening in Room 106

“Yes, my breast have barely grown in this year! But, even then, t-they have gotten a little bigger!”

A flat chest. In the past, that was what Koutarou had called Theia’s breasts, and Theia was aware of her size as well. But as time passed and Theia fell in love with Koutarou, she began worrying what he felt about her breasts. Does he still not want to touch them? Or has he changed his evaluation of them? To others it might sound stupid, but this was important to Theia.

“They shouldn’t be as shapeless as you think! Surely!”

Theia was desperate. Theia had her belief that Koutarou would stay by her side as long as she stayed true to her fate. But she also wanted Koutarou to love her as a woman. If Koutarou didn’t want to touch her breasts, it would mean that those weren’t loved. And that was a serious problem that could shake her position as a woman.

“…Theia…”

Theia’s series of words showed Koutarou how she felt for him. As a result, Koutarou could feel himself compelled by something inside of him. If he let down his guard, he felt that he might embrace the Theia in front of him.

Wait, calm down! That would be bad!

However, as Koutarou’s arm started to move slightly, he managed to stop himself. This was because he recalled the problems regarding this room. After taking several deep breaths, he smiled at Theia.

“Actually… the breasts’ size are unrelated to whether or not I want to touch them.”

Though he had calmed down, talking about girls’ breasts was uncomfortable for Koutarou. As a result, he couldn’t keep himself from blushing.

“But… that’s not what you said back then…”

Koutarou spoke out his intentions, but Theia couldn’t accept that right away since he was saying the opposite of what he had before. So Theia looked up at Koutarou with an inquisitive look. That was when Koutarou decided to expand on his explanation.

“Back then, I didn’t like you, so I brought the size of your breasts into the argument, even though I didn’t really care.”

Back then, Koutarou wanted to prove his innocence, so he pointed out that small breasts weren’t worth touching.

“Then, you don’t care if my breasts are small?”

Theia slightly leaned forward and her expression got a little brighter.

“The problem is what is inside, not the size of your breasts, right?”

As Koutarou said that, he turned to look towards the TV. In front of the TV was Sanae who was swinging from joy to sorrow.

“…I see. I understand.”

Theia looked at Sanae and nodded.

He would touch because he wants to. Touching someone’s breasts just because they’re large certainly is sad…

If the body was all that was important, Sanae probably wouldn’t have made it back. But that wasn’t the case. Then the same would hold true for the figure, the face, the breasts and height. If any of those were the only important things, they couldn’t have a proper relationship. The only time the appearance was a problem was when their relationship was unstable.

Evening in Room 106

And what's important isn't if the sword is broken or not, but if the oath in it is not. How immature of me to be so concerned of the size of my breasts…

In fact, if appearance or position was important, Theia would not have chosen Koutarou. The same was true for Koutarou. She had fallen in love with him because that was the kind of man he was. Theia had been so concerned about her breasts that she had overlooked that. Having realized that, Theia called out to Koutarou with the smile she always wore.

"Then… the problem is if you love me or not, yes?"

Theia knew that Koutarou loved everyone, but she wasn't asking about that; she was asking if he loved her as a woman. If he didn't just want to talk and laugh together, but also to embrace her and feel her warmth. That should be the deciding factor if Koutarou wanted to touch her breasts or not.

"What do you think?"

"I don't know. But I do know that you won't run away if I touch you like this."

"Oh?"

Theia had put her hand on top of Koutarou's without him noticing. And once he noticed, he didn't try to shake her off, nor did he feel that it was unpleasant.

"You love me enough to allow this. Then it's only a matter of time before you'll want to touch my breasts…"

Theia narrowed her eyes and held onto Koutarou's hand.

"Fufufu, such futile resistance, Satomi Koutarou."

"How selfish…"

Koutarou criticized what Theia was saying, but on the inside he was thinking the opposite.

Futile resistance, huh… that might really be the case…

Just a moment ago, Koutarou was about to embrace Theia. He had barely managed to hold himself back, but that was exactly what Theia was pointing out. He was aware of that, and rejecting that more than needed would be odd. That's why, despite what he was saying, Koutarou lightly held Theia's hand as well. As if responding to that, Theia entwined her fingers with Koutarou's.

"Yes. I am selfish. I'm an invader after all."

Theia's invasion was progressing smoothly.

That's why her smile at this time was overflowing with confidence.

Evening in Room 106

Part 3

While waiting for Ruth to finish making the tea, the bored Koutarou was looking at what Theia was doing. She had intently been drawing something on a large piece of paper for a while now.

“By the way, what are you doing?”

“I thought of a way to power-up your armor.”

Theia showed a big smile and presented the paper to Koutarou.

“Let’s see… ‘The Super Koutarou I’ve Thought Up?’“

That was what was written at the very top of the paper. On the paper were a large amount of ideas to strengthen Koutarou’s armor. Koutarou couldn’t help but lower his eyebrows when he read the title.

“Hey, don’t use me for your games, Theia.”

“How rude, I am fully serious… There have been a lot of troublesome incidents lately, right? So I figured there would be no harm in preparing for any future trouble.”

“That’s true…”

The title aside, Koutarou could agree with Theia’s idea. The peace of room 106 was something all the residents wished for.

“Then Theia, what’s the meaning of this drawing? It’s a big mess and I can’t understand it.”

Below the title, many lines formed a complex figure, and it was impossible to understand what Theia meant by power up from just a single look at it. That’s why Koutarou needed an explanation.

“I came up with additional equipment. But, if they got in the way of your movement, there wouldn’t be any point, so I was thinking of positioning small unmanned fighters of various types around you. And that formation would support you in your battles.”

“Hmm… so where am I in this drawing? There are too many lines for me to tell.”

“Uhm, around here.”

Theia used the pen in her hand to draw a circle around the center of the drawing.

“…You’re an idiot, aren’t you?”

As she did, Koutarou was fully amazed.

“What do you mean with idiot?!”

Disliking Koutarou’s reaction, Theia puffed up her cheeks and frowned.

“I’m completely buried in your additional equipment! This is far beyond that level!”

The circle marker that Theia drew was very small. It was only obvious that Koutarou couldn’t spot himself in that, as about 99% was taken up by the additional equipment.

“With this you will never lose! No matter what enemy you face, you will be okay!”

“What’s the point of me being in the middle of all of this!?”

“You will be the victor!”

“Just use the Blue Knight from the start!”

Evening in Room 106

A swarm of unmanned fighters surrounded Koutarou for several dozen meters. With this, there was absolutely no point of Koutarou fighting, and it would be more efficient to just use the spaceship, the Blue Knight, to attack. This idea for a power-up was straight up useless.

“I don’t want that! I want you to be strong! I want Super Koutarou!”

“…Satomi-sama, you don’t understand anything. These plans are filled with my own and her highness’s dreams and romance.”

Theia was throwing a fuss, while Ruth, who was pouring up tea, began talking about romance.

The two of them had absolute confidence in this power-up idea.

“With this you can save me and Ruth from any danger, and you’ll stand in the spotlight and defeat the enemy!”

“With this, the unmanned fighters will be the ones in the spotlight!”

“No, it will be Satomi-sama.”

“Give me a break!”

Koutarou wanted to defend the peace of room 106 as efficiently as possible, while Ruth and Theia wanted Koutarou to shine. Their discussion had reached a deadlock.

“…What are you clamoring about?”

That was when Kiriha appeared in the room. Kiriha had gone out with Shizuka to buy groceries for tonight’s supper and she had just gotten back.

“I was thinking how much of an idiot Theia is.”

“What do you mean with idiot?! Is that a word you’d use on your master whom you love?!”

“Master or not, you are an idiot!”

“Your highness, maybe we should hear Kiriha-sama’s opinion.”

“Yes! Take a look at this, Kiriha! Koutarou saw this and called us idiots!”

Theia took the drawing from Koutarou’s hand and pushed it towards Kiriha. Having received the drawing, Kiriha carefully looked it through.

“…Hmm, ‘The Super Koutarou I’ve Thought Up,’ huh…”

Having deciphered the complex drawing, Kiriha lowered her eyebrows slightly.

“Tell her, Kiriha-san! Teach this idiot about reality!”

Koutarou had high hopes that the normally calm Kiriha would be able to convince Theia.

“Theia-dono, this plan has several large holes in it.”

“Yeah, like that!”

Hearing just the words he wanted to hear from Kiriha, Koutarou had a satisfied smile on his face as he nodded.

“What!?”

Theia on the other hand got excited and pressed Kiriha.

“To fill those holes, I see a need to add in mass produced haniwas.”

“I thought so! As expected from Kiriha! You do get it!”

However, things didn’t develop the way Koutarou wanted. Having received Kiriha’s backup, Theia gained even more momentum.

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“So you’re the same as them, Kiriha-san!?”

Having had his hopes betrayed, Koutarou could feel his strength leave his body.

“Absolute safety, complete victory! That is the way to go!”

“What a splendid plan, your highness.”

While looking at Theia whose eyes were sparkling from excitement, and Ruth who was giving her an applause, in the corner of his eye, Koutarou complained to Kiriha.

“…Why are you joining in too?”

“Yes. It might be useless from a strategic point of view.”

“Then—”

“But, with that, you won’t have to fight.”

“Eh?”

“You are strong, but… we don’t want you to dirty your hands for our sake. But in that sense, it’s a very useful plan.”

Kiriha had a different point of view from Theia. She would prefer it if Koutarou didn’t have to fight. Rather than Koutarou holding a sword, she preferred Koutarou holding a kitchen knife and cooking.

“I understand that too… but, isn’t there a better way?”

Koutarou didn’t want to see Kiriha and the others fight either.

In order for the girls to solve their individual problems they had to fight. But Koutarou preferred the girls when they were normal. That’s why he understood what Kiriha felt, but he didn’t understand what the point in only powering him up was.

“Fufu… don’t worry, that plan won’t be realized.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Even though Theia-dono has highly advanced technology, there’s a limit. It will naturally turn into something more realistic.”

Kiriha was sensitive to the feelings of others, so she understood Koutarou’s confusion. The girls wanting to make Koutarou stronger probably has part of their desires as maidens mixed into it.

The girls weren’t thinking of protecting everyone efficiently, but would rather have Koutarou eliminate all enemies without taking so much as a step, while at the same time protecting everyone. In other words, they were trying to create an invincible prince on a white horse.

But even if they tried to convey that to Koutarou, he wouldn’t understand. Since that was how Kiriha thought, she told him that it was unrealistic and tried to convince him instead.

“Then that’s good.”

“Yes, you only need to smile.”

“What’s good?”

“I’ll explain so go put on your body.”

“Okay.”

“Realistically speaking, nothing is more effective than us teaming up.”

“That’s not true. I will eventually make Koutarou into the strongest man in the universe.”

Evening in Room 106

“…So some grand make-believe will start at some point, huh…”

“Satomi-sama, please call it production.”

“For me, a legendary princess, you are my knight. If you aren’t able to at least split a planet or two in half, you won’t be much to talk about.”

“As if I would be able to do that!”

Koutarou and the girls continued this discussion with no consideration whatsoever, although it could more accurately be described as playing. The discussion itself didn’t hold that much of a meaning.

And outside the room was a single pair of eyes watching over Koutarou and the others. They belonged to Yurika, who had been unable to enter the room ever since she returned.

Satomi-san…

Yurika was pressed up against the wall and hiding by the hallway leading into the inner room and looking in. The room was overflowing with a harmonious atmosphere, but the same couldn’t be said for Yurika’s mind.

W-What should I do…

Yurika’s heart started beating faster and she was feeling dizzy from the blood rising to her head. Moreover, even though she wasn’t moving, she was unable to settle down, but at the same time she didn’t want to go away either. Her mouth was drying up and her breathing was strangely fast.

As of late, Yurika was unable to settle down when she was next to Koutarou. When he entered her view, she would get worked up and be unable to think of anything. But she didn’t want to leave his side or take her eyes off him. She wanted to feel his presence nearby and look at him. But when she was next to him, she didn’t know what to do. This was the first time in Yurika’s life that she experienced this kind of feeling.

“W-Why am I…”

“Can you see something? Yurika-chan?”

“Kyaaa!?”

That was when Shizuka who had been putting away groceries in the fridge came over to Yurika. Shizuka joined Yurika and pressed up against the wall and peered into the inner room. Since Yurika had been focused on what was going on inside the room, she felt as if her heart had stopped when Shizuka appeared.

“S-Shizuka-san!?”

“Hmm, it looks the same to me…”

Shizuka left the surprised Yurika be and watched over the room. However, she couldn’t spot anything out of the ordinary. That was when she realized that Yurika was the odd one.

Now that I think about it, Yurika has been acting strange lately…

Having gotten used to living in room 106, Yurika had gotten bolder, for better or worse. But after the incident with Sanae, she had started behaving suspiciously. The Yurika from just a while ago would have entered the room like it was her right to do so. But now, she was acting as timidly as she had when she first came to room 106.

“Could it be that you got into a fight with someone?”

That was the only reason Shizuka could think of. Yurika replied by quickly shaking her head.

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“It’s not like we fought or anything.”

As she did, her twin tails swung to the sides. Seeing that, Shizuka noticed that the ribbons at the root of her twin tails were a little off balance.

“Did something happen between you and Satomi-kun?”

Koutarou had been tying Yurika’s ribbons for a while now. Not only was Koutarou in the knitting society, but he was also serious about it so he took great care of her ribbons. That’s why, if the balance was off, Yurika must have been the one to tie them and not Koutarou.

“N-Not at all! That kind of thing would never–!”

Having something close to the truth pointed out, Yurika panicked and shook her head as her face turned as red as an apple.

“Ah!”

Seeing Yurika’s reaction, Shizuka guessed Yurika’s circumstance and clapped her hands together.

“What, so that’s it…”

Shizuka showed a mean smile.

“Ha!?”

And just as Yurika had a bad feeling about Shizuka’s smile,

“Ei!”

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

Shizuka swooped up one of Yurika’s legs and lightly pushed her upper body. By doing that, Yurika lost her balance and entered the inner room. Because she disliked exercise, Yurika was unable to regain her balance and took a pratfall next to Koutarou.

“Ow ow ow…”

“Are you okay, Yurika?”

Having entered the room and fallen on her butt, Koutarou gave her a worried look.

“Auu, Ahh, Awaaa…”

Yurika fumbled around and trembled in shame. She had shown her normal ungraceful and sloppy appearance, but right now, Yurika was unbelievably embarrassed that Koutarou had seen it.

“I-I-I’m okay, I’m okay!”

Yurika crawled on the floor and escaped from Koutarou. But since the inner room was so small, she didn’t get far. At most she could only get to the other side of the tea table.

“That was weird.”

Koutarou slightly tilted his head, but since this wasn’t the first time he had seen Yurika’s eccentric behavior, he didn’t think much of it and continued his conversation with the girls.

“Haaa…”

Once Koutarou took his glance off of Yurika, she was finally able to take a deep breath. That was when Shizuka sat down next to her.

“That’s no good, Yurika-chan. You have to try harder.”

“Shizuka-san! T-There are better ways to do it!”

“Even if you say that, you have a habit of running away, so if I don’t do something like that, you won’t even try.”

“T-That’s… true, but…”

“…You want to get along with Satomi-kun, right?”

Shizuka whispered into Yurika’s ear.

“…”

As she did, Yurika’s face turned red and she was at a loss for words. However, her silence eloquently conveyed how she felt.

“…If you at least don’t behave like normal, Satomi-kun will get lonely you know?”

“…How do I behave like normal?”

“…Just do what you want to do.”

“…But, that’s…”

Yurika’s face was turning redder and redder and her voice became quieter. She was already whispering to begin with, and now even Shizuka had a hard time hearing Yurika.

“…Having Koutarou see my strange sleeping face, gently brushing my disordered hair and scolding me to go to bed earlier when it looks like I’ll be late for school… I don’t want that, I’d be so embarrassed I could die!”

Everything that had been natural before was now unbearably embarrassing. She didn’t want to show her miserable appearance to the person she cared for. She wanted him to see her lovely and cute self. It wasn’t until now that Yurika’s feminine side had begun maturing.

“…Yurika-chan, could this be your… first love?”

“…”

Yurika remained silent and kept her face looking down.

“…I see… how great…”

Shizuka gently narrowed her eyes and smiled at Yurika.

“…My first love wasn’t like a wonderful great love like Yurika-chan’s… I wish it was…”

Shizuka’s first love was a long time ago, while she was still a grade-schooler. It was just a normal first love for a child, and it ended without anything happening. When compared to that, Yurika’s first love looked like it was shining brilliantly and beautifully.

“…I would prefer it your way…”

Yurika on the other hand had the opposite opinion.

During her year with Koutarou, she had shown her disgraceful appearance to him countless times. And now that she had developed romantic feelings for him, that was like a hopeless and unfavorable legacy. Having only shown that side to her, she worried that Koutarou wouldn’t be able to see her as a woman even if she confessed to him. At best, she could only stay as a freeloader or become like a younger sister. That was what Yurika thought.

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Part 4

After the dinner and games had ended, Koutarou and the others continued talking. There were the five invader girls, Koutarou and Shizuka, for a total of seven people. With seven people in the small room it was very stuffy, but nobody complained. Instead, they were simply chatting about nothing especially important. And the seven loved the calm atmosphere that was created.

“Koutarou, it’s starting to get warmer now, isn’t it.”

Though Sanae had recovered her body, she still liked to be by Koutarou’s back, and she peacefully spent her time clinging onto him.

“Well it’s almost summer, so you won’t be able to cling onto my back for any longer.”

Sanae’s body was light so the weight wasn’t much of a problem. The actual problem was her body heat. Once summer came around, the heat that would build up between Koutarou and Sanae should become unbearable.

“If that happens I’ll just strip out of my body.”

“Don’t strip.”

To Sanae, doing astral projection was easy. She was now cheerfully spending her days while switching between her body and her ghost form.

“Koutarou, this rice cracker is quite delicious.”

Next to Koutarou and Sanae, Theia was eating a rice cracker. After finishing one, she picked up a new one and put it in her mouth.

“Give me one too.”

Koutarou couldn’t move himself, so he asked Theia to get him one. Unlike before, it was harder to move with Sanae on his back.

“Okay.”

And instead of reaching for the bag, Theia turned towards Koutarou and presented him with the rice cracker that had been in her mouth.

“I don’t want one you’ve already started on.”

However, Koutarou had no intentions of eating a rice cracker Theia had already bit into. When he did, Theia took the rice cracker and let out a small sigh.

“…You really are a wuss… Ruth.”

“Yes.”

Ruth who was sitting next to Theia, pulled out a rice cracker from the bag and presented it to Koutarou. Sanae took it and split it in half. She put one half in her mouth and pushed the other half into Koutarou’s.

“Oh, it really is good.”

“You’re right! …How does it taste for you, Koutarou?”

After tasting the rice cracker herself, Sanae used her spiritual powers to read Koutarou’s sense of taste.

“…I think it’ll be more delicious if Koutarou eats it.”

Sanae stopped eating herself, and focused on Koutarou’s taste. Since there is a difference in how individuals feel taste there were cases when things tasted better for Koutarou than for

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Sanae. In those cases, Sanae would do as she did as a ghost and let Koutarou do the eating while she read his senses.

“I shall leave the rest to you, now make me proud.”

Sanae then lightly pulled the bag of rice crackers closer with her spiritual powers.

“That’s a convenient power…”

Koutarou put his hand into the bag and pulled out a rice cracker while smiling wryly. That was when Kiriha who was folding laundry in front of the wardrobe called out to him.

“Koutarou, the bath should be ready by now. Why don’t you go in?”

“Hm, yeah, thanks. I think I’ll do just that.”

Koutarou pushed the new rice cracker into his mouth and removed Sanae’s arms around his neck.

“You’re already done?”

“Yeah. Sorry, but you’ll have to eat them yourself.”

“Boo.”

Koutarou left the pouting Sanae where she was and approached Kiriha. As he did, she gave him a new set of clothes and a towel. They had just been washed and were neatly folded.

“You could just give me those unfolded ones.”

“No, that won’t do.”

Kiriha smiled and picked up the next piece of laundry.

“But I’ll wear them in a moment.”

“That’s right. But take the already folded ones.”

Kiriha then carefully folded each piece of clothing. It was a casual act, but she did so with deep love and consideration. Facing her like left Koutarou a little embarrassed.

Would she be like this if we got married…

He began doing something he rarely ever did before, which was imagining a future together with someone. That was how Koutarou started feeling as he looked at Kiriha folding the laundry and felt both happy and embarrassed. This was the first time he had felt like this.

I wonder if the old man felt like this before he married mom…

Koutarou thought of his father who had transferred far away. He felt like he wanted to ask his father what caused him to marry his mother.

“Koutarou?”

Confused as to why Koutarou was just standing there, Kiriha stopped folding the laundry and looked up at him.

“Hm? Ah, sorry. I’ll go take a bath.”

“You can take your time.”

“Yeah.”

After Koutarou returned to his self, he entered the bathroom as Kiriha smiled and saw him off. In response to that, one person let out a large sigh of relief.

“Phew~…”

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That person was Yurika. As Yurika exhaled, she fell onto the tea table. Having spent a long period of time under extreme tension, she completely relaxed her body.

“What’s wrong, Yurika, you’re acting strange. …Well, you were strange to begin with, but you’re stranger than normal.”

Sanae, who was watching TV near Yurika, looked over with a confused expression. Since she could see auras, she knew that Yurika’s emotions were disorderly. The disorder that had started a while back confused Sanae.

“Strange… it’s everyone else who are strange. How can you all be fine in this kind of situation?”

Yurika replied while still leaning on the tea table. She was at a complete loss.

“What kind of situation?”

“Living together with Satomi-san!”

That was Yurika’s problem. She just couldn’t accept that.

“What? Yurika, did Koutarou do something to you?”

“Could it be the ointment for stiff shoulders that he put up your nose during our last penalty game?”

“Ah, that looked painful…”

“Well… at worst he might have tried out some more wrestling techniques on her.”

“Or could it be that he did something lewd to you?”

“That’s not it, that’s not it at all! That would have been a lot easier.”

To Yurika, penalty games or being the object of desire was far easier to deal with than her current predicament.

“Then what’s the problem?”

The group mysteriously looked at Yurika. To them, her actions were what was strange.

“…T-The person that really treasures me and is always with me every day, and also needs me i-is not a girl!”

Yurika had friends, there was obviously Koutarou, the invader girls and Harumi and her master Nana.

But this was the first time that Yurika was vaguely conscious of her own sloppiness and both she and the other party needed one another. The fact that the other party was a boy was a problem. Up until now, Yurika had never been close to anyone but girls.

This was the first time Yurika had noticed a boy that she felt more than just friendship towards, and she was puzzled because he was too close to her.

“Are you… an idiot?”

Theia retorted harshly.

“That’s saying too much, your highness. There wasn’t any groundwork in place like for me and you.”

“Even if you say that…”

Theia had been with Ruth, wherein the two had mutual trust for one another, for a long time, so she was used to dealing with people like that. That’s why once she realized her feelings on Valentine’s day, her feelings had not been as chaotic.

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It's not like I don't know how she feels…

Theia thought that the confusion Yurika was feeling was similar to what she had felt when Koutarou had suddenly vanished and just as suddenly returned. That was when Theia first noticed her feelings and she had been greatly shaken up by that person disappearing and reappearing. That's why it wasn't like she didn't understand Yurika's feelings.

However, Yurika's current state looked similar to what she had felt after her confession, that's why she couldn't really sympathize with Yurika.

"If you don't like being with Koutarou, then you can just run away. That's what you're good at, right?"

Sanae tilted her head.

Love is love and hate is hate. To Sanae who had a straight and honest personality, Yurika's situation was beyond her understanding.

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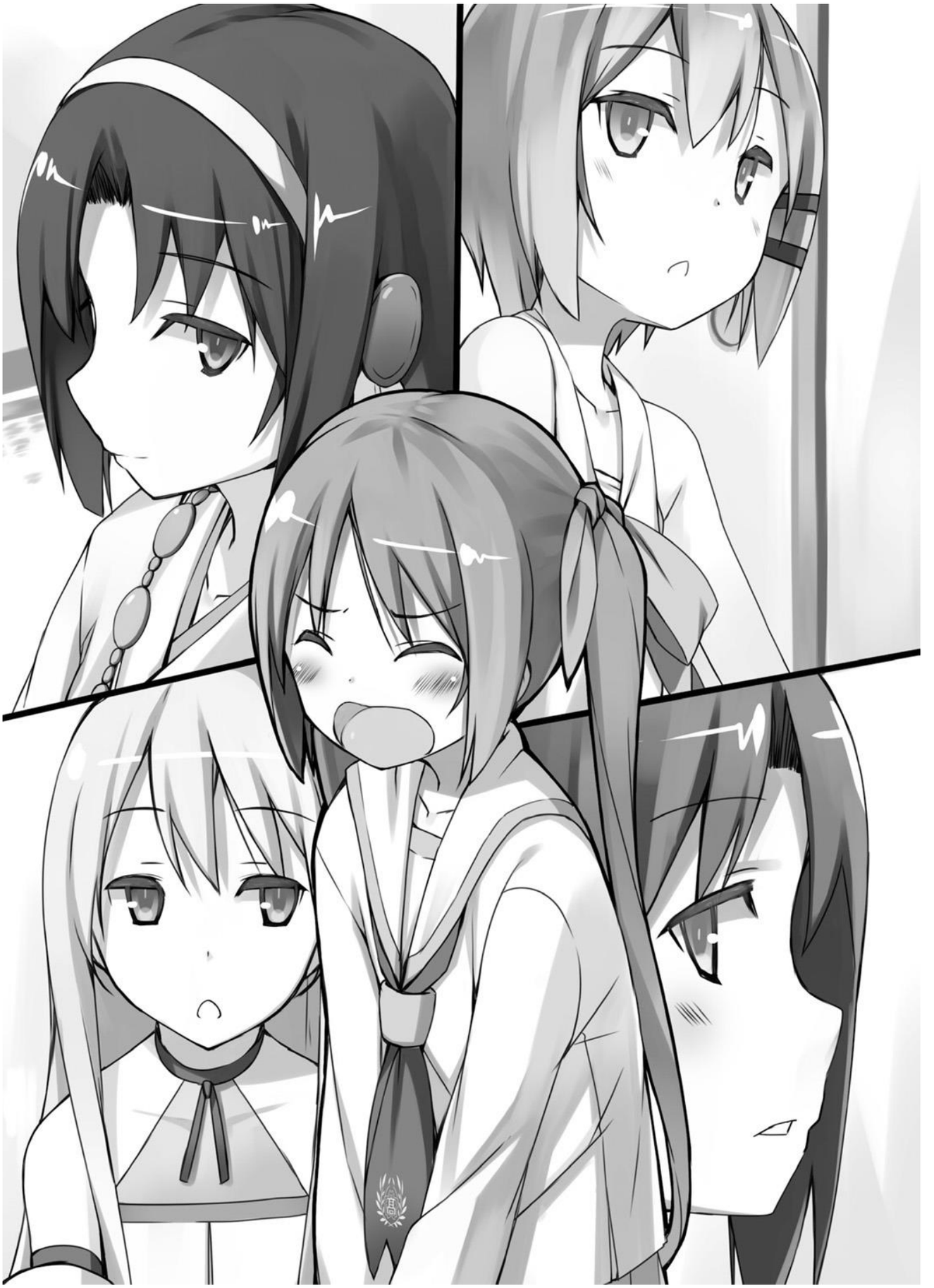

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“If I didn’t like it I would have run away a long time ago! I’m troubled because I do!”

Yurika wanted to be with Koutarou.

Thinking back to all the days she had spent in this room, she realized that she had been happy for the entire year. The first few months had been chaotic, but the latest months had been like living in a calm and sunny place. There was no way that Yurika could hate Koutarou, who was the center of that sunlight. If anything, she was troubled because she couldn’t hate him. She didn’t want to disappoint Koutarou by showing him her ungraceful sides, but she didn’t know what to do to show him a more proper and cuter version of herself. As a result, Yurika was in a torturous situation where she didn’t want to run away, but wanted to escape at the same time.

“…Yurika-chan, your way of thinking is similar to Satomi-kun’s. You’re worried that there’s no way that someone would love you. But that’s not true at all.”

Shizuka who had learned of Yurika’s circumstances a while ago was smiling. Shizuka loved this kind of positive gossip. She always wanted to listen to happy stories like this. It’s possible that her parents’ absence was the reason for this.

“Satomi Koutarou needs the normal you. You don’t have to do anything out of the ordinary, just be yourself.”

Yurika’s appearance was adorable to Kiriha, who understood Koutarou’s personality better than anyone else. Yurika was alternating between joy and sorrow while striving to create a better relationship through trial and error. Since Kiriha thought that their bond was wonderful, she simply watched over Yurika and avoided any actual intervention.

“Really!? Would that really be alright!? Won’t he just think I’m some strange girl!?”

Yurika had no confidence.

She knew that Koutarou needed her normal self, but she was anxious that his opinion of her as a woman would just keep falling. She wanted the person she liked to think highly of her.

“Have some confidence Ho-! It’s fun taking care of Yurika-chan Ho-!”

“You’ll be alright Ho-, useless girls can be cute Ho-!”

“I don’t want that~! Aaaaaaa…”

Yurika slumped down over the tea table after hearing the haniwas’ follow-up. Her problems remained unsolved. At this rate, Koutarou would get out of the bath without her having a single countermeasure in place. And so, Yurika racked her brain once more.

“Well… you can do it… let’s go, Ruth.”

Theia threw a side glance at Yurika and stood up before heading towards the wall leading to the Blue Knight.

“Are you already done, your highness?”

Ruth quickly followed after Theia, but since it was a little too early to go to sleep, Ruth was interested in Theia’s intentions. That was when Theia whispered back so only Ruth could hear.

“…It’s would be best to give her some time. Especially in her case…”

Theia was planning on giving Yurika time; time to think on her own and time to spend together with just Koutarou.

“I see. What a wonderful idea.”

“Of course. I am not a dictator.”

“Yes. Well then everyone, good night.”

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“Aa!? Wait, Theia-chan, Ruth-san!”

The two left room 106, ignoring Yurika’s pleas.

“Well then, maybe I should go for the day as well.”

“…Here I am hearing that there are problems, but that’s all? …Geez, I have to carry this body all the way home…”

“Karama, Korama, you don’t have to watch over this room for today. Leave the two alone. Instead keep watch outside.”

“Understood Ho-!”

“You’re the best, Nee-san, Ho-!”

Realizing Theia’s intentions, the other girls stood up one after another.

“Ah, don’t go!”

At this rate, Yurika would be alone with Koutarou. Yurika had nowhere to run. She thought of jumping into the wardrobe and hiding under her futon, but she thought that was ungraceful and was unable to do so. She could already see Koutarou opening the door to the wardrobe and telling her to get in the bath.

“Please, don’t leave me alone!”

Yurika clung onto Shizuka in an attempt to keep her here. Being alone with Koutarou was like torture to Yurika, so she was desperate.

“Yurika-chan, let me know what happened tomorrow.”

“Kyaaaaaaa!?”

However, Shizuka casually grabbed Yurika’s wrist and gently threw her onto the floor before leaving like nothing had happened. By the time Yurika hurriedly got back up, there was no one else in room 106 but Yurika and Koutarou.

“Uaaa… ahhh… auuuu~”

Yurika was at a loss as she reached out towards the front door.

I-If it’s going to be like this, then I should just work hard to become a girl that can keep it together!

Yurika had always been thinking that nobody would like her. She thought Harumi and Nana only got close to her because they were especially kind. But reality was different, the girls in room 106 liked Yurika, and Koutarou needed her.

Yurika didn’t know how that had happened, but she began worrying that if she didn’t do something special she would be hated. That’s why Yurika had been repeating completely useless things without end. The other girls had hurried on home because they knew that no matter what happened, it couldn’t make the situation worse.

I have to run! But where!? Even though this is the place where I can feel at ease the most!? T-Then I should at least make myself look a little better… but I can’t use the bathroom because Satomi-san is on the other side of the glass! T-T-Then I-I-let’s put on some tea… but, how do you do that!? Teach me, Kiriha-saaa~n! Then what about I pretend to be studying!? T-That won’t work either, I can’t show Satomi-san all the mistakes I would make!

Yurika rolled around on the floor and time passed as she couldn’t come up with anything.

“S-Save me, Satomi-san! Wait, Satomi-san was the problem! Noooooo, what should I do!?”

“…I’m what?”

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That was when Koutarou stepped out of the bathroom while wiping his head with a towel. Yurika was still rolling around on the floor, but Koutarou didn't think too much of it. He then approached the fridge, pulled out a bottle of barley-tea and poured it into a cup.

"I-I-It's nothing, nothing at all."

Yurika shook her head in a fluster as Koutarou entered the inner room with his cup in hand.

"Oh? Did everyone already go home?"

Koutarou had entered the room to confirm how many people in the room he should pour up barley tea for, but he only saw Yurika.

"Y-Yes, just a moment ago!"

"I see."

If it was just Yurika, there was no need to confirm. Koutarou prepared a cup for Yurika and poured up some barley tea. Since Yurika was such a glutton, he couldn't imagine her saying no.

"Yurika, would you like it sweet or not?"

Next, Koutarou opened up a cupboard and began choosing a snack.

"Eh!? Sweet or not!?"

From Yurika's position, she couldn't see Koutarou. So she didn't interpret Koutarou's words as asking what kind of snack she would like.

Sweet or not, w-w-what does he mean!? Could he be talking about k-k-ki…

Koutarou's sudden appearance had confused Yurika even further. She completely misunderstood him, and so, she answered in the following fashion.

"…I-I would like a sweet one over an intense one… I-it's my first time…"

Yurika felt like steam was coming out of her head. Her heart was throbbing unbelievably fast. Her mind blanked out, and she could no longer understand anything. As a result, Yurika didn't notice her imagination was rapidly going out of control.

"Got it, a sweet one."

"…"

Yurika didn't respond, and instead simulated what was going to happen next.

Simulations where Koutarou would forcibly push her down on the floor, or she would push him to the floor. Or closing her eyes and having him gently whisper in her ear.

Thanks to her shoujo mangas, Yurika's preparation was perfect, and by the time Koutarou entered the room she had run through more than 30 different simulations. As a result, a clear image had formed in Yurika's mind.

And that image was of her and Koutarou pressing their lips against one another.

I-I-I'm going to kiss with Satomi-san! Uwaa, Uwaaaaaaa!

Despite it being just a fantasy, it looked like the ever-approaching reality to Yurika. And if today was a kiss, what would tomorrow be? What about the day after that? Yurika's mind filled with the intense scenes she had read from her shoujo manga.

"What ahe yho dhoin?"

Unaware of Yurika's delusions, Koutarou approached her with a cup in each hand a bag of jam donuts in his mouth.

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“Ah…”

Yurika naturally glanced towards Koutarou’s move and spotted the bag of jam donuts. That was when she realized she had made an incredibly misunderstanding.

“T-That’s right, that’s only obvious! Snacks, sweet snacks! Of course that’s what it would be!”

With Yurika’s face still red, she began making excuses to no one in particular. She was unbearably embarrassed by her own misunderstanding, to the point where she wanted to jump into a hole and hide. Unfortunately there were no holes in this room.

“What are you talking about?”

Koutarou looked at Yurika after putting down the cups and bean donuts on the tea table.

“Aha, aha, ahahahahaha.”

Yurika’s face was for some reason beet red and she was desperately continuing her fake laughter. Seeing that, Koutarou grew gradually worried.

“…Are you really okay?”

“Eh?”

With her red face and strange behavior, Koutarou began worrying if she had caught a cold or something. When he did, her strange behavior up until now began making sense.

“Yurika, bring your face a little closer.”

Koutarou had a serious expression as he approached Yurika.

Bring my face a little closer? Could he… really!?

Her delusion that had been shattered revived once more. Even though that couldn’t be the case, Yurika couldn’t think of any other reason.

“U-u-uhmm… please, be gentle…”

Yurika turned her face towards Koutarou and closed her eyes.

“Don’t worry, it’s not like I’m going to hit you.”

“Okay…”

Yurika had believed that her first kiss was still a long time away.

I really… will… kiss…

Yurika waited for that moment, full of expectations.

“Hmm, it doesn’t look like you have a fever.”

“Fuaaa!?”

However, when Koutarou put his hand on her forehead she realized she had misunderstood once more.

“Noooooo, I don’t want this, I can’t take this anymore!”

Yurika probably wouldn’t be as embarrassed walking to school naked as she was right now. Yurika couldn’t stand this situation anymore, so she got up and dashed out of the inner room. Koutarou who was left behind simply stood there, confused by Yurika’s actions.

“Yurika, really, what’s wrong with you!?”

Yurika was so fast that all Koutarou could do was throw his question as Yurika’s back.

“The bath, that’s right, I’m getting into the bath before going to sleep!”

Evening in Room 106

Like that, Yurika ran into the bathroom, her only remaining sanctuary.

And that was when she finally noticed.

What do I do? What do I do!? I-I-I'm living in the same room as a boy!

She realized a very obvious fact that had gone unnoticed for an entire year.

Evening in Room 106

Part 5

When she came to, Yurika was looking up at the ceiling in room 106's inner room.

"Huh…?"

Trying to remember what had happened just before, Yurika blankly stared up at the ceiling. As time passed, she gradually began absorbing the situation around her.

"Next up is baseball. A fierce battle of skill between both teams…"

The first thing she heard was the news being broadcast on the TV. She heard the voice of a female announcer presenting the news. She realized that there was someone else in the room with her as she didn't watch the news.

The next thing she felt was a breeze. It was a gentle breeze that cooled her hot body. After being hit by the breeze for a while, Yurika looked in the direction it was coming from.

"…It'sh Shatomi-shan…"

In front of her, she could see a lone boy. The boy was holding a fan in his hand. He was the one responsible for the breeze Yurika was feeling.

"…Mmm, mfufu…"

Yurika loved that boy, so just seeing him made her happy. While still in a daze, she looked at the boy and smiled.

"Did you wake up, Yurika?"

Hearing Yurika's muffled laughter, the boy looked at her face.

"Are you okay?"

He had a worried but gentle look.

Satomi-san was worried for me…

Seeing that, Yurika felt a little guilty. But at the same time, she was happy that he was worrying for her. That's why Yurika wanted to put the boy at ease. She began thinking of what kind of situation she was in.

Uhm, did I fight with Maki-chan? Or someone else from Darkness Rainbow? Did one of Theia-chan's enemies show up? Or was it about Sanae-chan's body?

Most of the time the boy had worried for Yurika had been during such crises. And during such times, there were times she would be hurt, but fortunately, Yurika couldn't see anything strange on her body.

"I'm fine, I'm fine… there's nothing wrong…"

Confirming that she was alright, Yurika smiled at the boy.

I'm okay… so don't worry, I'll always be with you…

It seemed Yurika's feelings reached the boy as his worried look disappeared, leaving behind his gentle expression. Satisfied by that, Yurika continued looking at the boy while wishing that she could always stay like this.

"I see… that's good. You really surprised me you know? While I was thinking that you were taking an unexpectedly long bath, I heard a sudden noise from the bathroom."

"Bath? H-Huh…?"

Evening in Room 106

Hearing that word, Yurika's brain began working rapidly. Her daze vanished and her mind cleared up.

"And when I came to see what was happening I found you collapsed in the bathroom…"

"Ah, n-now that I think about it…"

That was when Yurika remembered what had happened to her.

Yurika had run into the bathroom to escape from the boy, Koutarou, in front of her, but she had been too scared to leave so she stayed in the tub. When she began thinking that she couldn't stay in any longer, she suddenly stood up and she lost her balance.

That was as far as Yurika could remember. After she fell, she had lost consciousness.

"…Did you carry me out, Satomi-san?"

"Yeah. And now you finally woke up."

"I see… I'm sorry for making you worry…"

"Just lie down for a while. You have a big bump on your forehead."

"Okay…"

Yurika moved her hand and touched her forehead. As she did, she could feel a wet towel and some pain. It was a bump she had gotten by hitting something as she fell.

"If you start to feel bad, don't just endure it, let me know instead, okay?"

"Ahaha, I don't endure anything at all."

"No, you're the type that only endures during the most important times."

As Koutarou said that, he changed the towel on Yurika's head. The new towel felt cold. However, Koutarou's words were so impactful that Yurika forgot about that sensation. Eventually, that shock turned into joy.

…If I am with this person, if it's for this person… then I can probably do anything…

Koutarou said these things knowing Yurika's bad sides. Yurika hadn't met a person like this before. Or it might be that she had decided beforehand that this kind of person didn't exist. But now, here was someone that accepted her good and bad sides. That's why Yurika felt like crying, but she held it in and smiled at Koutarou.

"…Do I look that patient?"

"Less patient and more foolish, I guess."

"Foolish…"

If Yurika had been the way she had been until now, she would have probably started complaining, unable to accept being called foolish. But now, she could for some reason accept that word. This confused Yurika, but she didn't find it strange.

"I think so. Fools have… confidence after all…"

"What's wrong? Does it hurt?"

Yurika could no longer hold back her feelings very well, and a portion of her emotions that broke free turned into tears and fell. Seeing that, Koutarou remembered that Yurika had hit her head and closed in a little.

"No…"

Yurika shook her head.

Evening in Room 106

“It’s just… that I was thinking about how you understand me… and that made me so happy…”

Yurika revealed her feelings in a natural fashion.

Before she had stormed into the bathroom, Yurika had been so embarrassed she couldn’t even speak to Koutarou, let alone look at his face. But now was different. Something in Yurika’s heart was changing. What exactly that was remained unclear, but her heart started to beat faster, in a different way than the out of control throbbing from before. Those beats spread Yurika and Koutarou’s feelings throughout her body.

“I-I see…”

In fact, the one embarrassed at this time, was Koutarou.

What is this… For some reason… Yurika looks like a girl today, or rather, she looks… cute?

Seeing Yurika smile, Koutarou felt his heart starting to beat faster. It was a feeling he hadn’t felt before. It was quite obviously different from the trust he showed towards her. It was the moment when something changed inside Koutarou’s heart.

“…”

“…”

Both sides remained silent. But unlike before, neither of them felt troubled by this situation. They felt a little embarrassed, but they both felt at ease in this silence. And like that, time passed, and once the towel on Yurika’s head was starting to become lukewarm, Yurika got up.

“Uhm… can I ask you something?”

As Yurika said that, she looked at her body. She was wearing the pajamas made from soft cloth she always wore to bed.

“Hm? Yeah sure.”

Koutarou took the towel from Yurika and wringed it out in a bowl of water.

“Then…”

Yurika started blushing a little. What she was about to say was something that she wanted to know, but took courage to ask. She felt like this moment was her only chance. That’s why she mustered all the courage she could get and asked Koutarou her question.

“Satomi-san, you… carried me… from the bathroom to here, right?”

“That’s right.”

Koutarou stopped moving his hands.

“And then… you put clothes on me… right?”

“…Yeah.”

Koutarou’s answer was slightly delayed. He realized what Yurika wanted to ask. And then Yurika’s face turned even redder.

“T-Then, you… saw it… right? My, uhm, naked… body…”

Yurika mustered all the courage she could, but even then her voice was very quiet by the end of her sentence. And while her face was turned down, she looked up with her eyes to watch how Koutarou reacted.

“I’m sorry. But I had to… I’ll try to forget it as quickly as possible.”

Evening in Room 106

Even Koutarou knew that a girl would be embarrassed about having her naked body seen by others. That's why he honestly apologized.

"No… that's not what I meant…"

Yurika lightly shook her head.

"Eh?"

Koutarou hadn't expected Yurika to react like this. Surprised, Koutarou's eyes opened wide.

"Don't you have any other impressions… other than being sorry? I mean…"

"T-That's…"

Yurika's next words surprised him even more. Koutarou was left at a complete loss for words.

Yurika was well aware that Koutarou had seen her body due to his good intentions. To the Yurika of the past, that might have been good enough, but now she wanted another feeling to be mixed in. She was obviously embarrassed and would hide in a hole if she could. But she wanted Koutarou to be interested in her as a girl.

"How… was it? Did… you feel anything?"

"I—"

Didn't feel anything.

Just before Koutarou was about that he shut his mouth.

Wait, is that answer actually true?

Evening in Room 106

Evening in Room 106

Not feeling anything after seeing a woman naked. In general that might be accurate, but was that really true for Koutarou and Yurika? That was what Koutarou was wondering.

The invader girls had pointed out Koutarou's flawed personality. That had been why he hurt Ruth during her arranged marriage and why he hadn't hoped for Sanae to recover. And like with them, wouldn't Yurika simply reject his answer? An answer too correct might sound cold to the people close to him.

Realizing that, Koutarou gave a different answer from what he normally would have.

"Well, uhm… I think you looked, beautiful…"

Thinking that delving into details would be going too far and that not seeing anything would be strange, this was the utmost impression Koutarou was able to express.

"I-I see…"

Yurika lifted her head and a bit of joy was mixed in with her embarrassed expression. Seeing that, Koutarou felt like his decision had been correct.

I can be a little open with Yurika and the others…

At this time, Koutarou was reminded of a very natural thing.

"No more comments…"

"I know I was the one who asked, but… I would prefer it that way too…"

The two fell silent once more. They were even more embarrassed than before, and their hearts were racing, but they didn't feel uncomfortable. That's why Koutarou and Yurika didn't go against their senses and simply let time pass.

"Kyaa!?"

"Uwah!?"

However, at some point they could hear a noise from Shizuka on the floor above them. It was just the sound of Shizuka knocking something down, but to Koutarou and Yurika, it felt like Shizuka had suddenly jumped in between the two.

"Ah, u-hm, so where were we?"

"T-That's right, I have something I wanted to talk to you about too."

From the moment they heard that noise, the calm and gentle atmosphere between them changed back to their normal atmosphere. After noticing Shizuka's existence, they couldn't return to that special atmosphere.

"Yurika, could you look at this."

"What is this…?"

Koutarou spoke at a rapid pace and put down several pamphlets in front of Yurika. The pamphlets them all used large, square buildings as their background.

"They're pamphlets of universities. I got them from the teacher today."

"Universities?"

The pamphlets Koutarou had put down were all entrance guides to nearby universities. Koutarou wanted to show these to Yurika, so he had gone to the teacher in charge of guide to pick them up.

"Actually, recently in the knitting society, we got on to the topic of Sakuraba-senpai's graduation. You know she's already on her third year, right?"

Evening in Room 106

“Oh yeah…”

Yurika and the others had become second years. That meant that Harumi had become a third year, and she would have university exams this year.

“While we were talking about schools, I started getting more and more worried about what you will do. That’s why I brought these.”

“What I will do…”

Yurika touched the pamphlets with a look of blank surprise.

I had never even thought of that…

That wasn’t because she hadn’t planned for anything. But because since she was a magical girl, the concept of moving on to study in a university had never occurred to her. Once the problem with room 106 cleared up, the chances of her next being in this city weren’t all that high.

“Yurika, according to the teacher, you should be able to get into the universities around here, even with your grades if you work hard these next two years. Where do you want to go?”

Yurika’s grades were always balancing a thin line between passing and failing.

But the pamphlets Koutarou had brought with him were all universities she could get into if she studied for it. Of course, she would need to put in some serious efforts.

“E-Even if you suddenly bring that up, I…”

Yurika couldn’t decide.

This was the first time she had even considered studying in a university. And in order to give Yurika a hint, Koutarou continued speaking.

“By the way, this is where Sakuraba-senpai will be going. Kitsushou University. With her grades, she would pass the exam with flying colors, but there’s also the worries for her body, so that’s why she picked this. It would be hard for you to get in though. That’s why if you want to go to the same university as Sakuraba-senpai you would have to start studying now, or it will be too late.”

Kitsushou University was a local university from before the merge of Kitsushou city and Harukaze city. When the difficulty of the entrance exam is compared to all other universities, it would end up on the upper half of the list. For an honors student like Harumi, it was easy to get in. But because of her weak constitution, she had picked this university because it was close to the hospital.

And since Harumi and Yurika were best friends, Koutarou figured that Yurika would want to enter the same university.

“Sakuraba-senpai will be going to Kitsushou University…”

Yurika mumbled to herself as she picked up their pamphlet.

Will I… study at a university…?

After becoming a magical girl instead of Nana, Yurika had figured that she wouldn’t be able to live a normal life. She had only entered Harukaze High School because she wanted to harass Koutarou and make him leave room 106. And now, a chance to live a normal life had suddenly appeared in front of her. That’s why this still didn’t feel real to Yurika.

“What university will you go to, Satomi-san?”

Yurika who wanted a few more hints asked Koutarou what school he was interested in.

“I’ll be going to one of the local universities, Kitsushou University or Harukaze University. But like you, I’m not sure if I’ll get in.”

Evening in Room 106

Koutarou was interested in either Kitsushou University or Harukaze University. But those were different from what he had originally been planning. In the past, he was planning to enter a university that he could get into with his grades, regardless of proximity to him.

But as of late, Koutarou felt like making an effort to stay in the same city his friends lived in. This was a feeling he had awoken to after the incident with Sanae.

“I’ll try to get into Kitsushou University and if that doesn’t work, I’ll lower the bar a little and aim for Harukaze University, I guess. Haru U has a famous baseball club, so it’s a win-win.”

Harukaze University was a technical university, and it was around the middle of the list in terms of difficulty to get in. Since it was a university with plenty of sports clubs, it was attractive to Koutarou, but it was a bit further away than Kitsushou University. As a result, both universities were about as attractive. And if Koutarou aimed to get into the more difficult Kitsushou University, he would have an easier time getting into Harukaze University if he failed. Because of that, his current choice was Kitsushou University.

“Satomi-san is going to Kitsushou U too…”

“What will you do?”

“…I, uhm… I never thought about it…”

Yurika honestly revealed her hesitation. She still wasn’t sure how she felt.

“Then take some time to think about it.”

“Yes…”

Yurika looked at the pamphlet once more. She imagined herself heading towards the white building pictured on it. There, she saw herself, Koutarou and Harumi pass through the gates together. To her, that was like a dream come true.

After thinking for a while, she eventually turned towards Koutarou.

“Uhm, Satomi-san, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah.”

“What… do you think I should do? Not just what university, but if I should go study at a university or not to begin with…”

Yurika still couldn’t make a decision. She was a coward, and it took courage to head towards a new future. What’s more, it’s a future she was supposed to have given up. She felt like she couldn’t decide herself.

“I think that’s something you decide for yourself.”

Koutarou’s answer was the same he had given Ruth during her arranged marriage. In the end, this was something Yurika had to decide on. But he didn’t stop there.

“But I think you would be better off studying at a university. And instead of going somewhere far away, I would like you to live somewhere close. That way would be more fun.”

Even if the commotion around room 106 were to end, Koutarou wanted these happy days to continue. He had never wished for that before, feeling that he shouldn’t try hoping. But there are those who wish for it. Yurika might be one of those as well. In that case, should he wish for the same and show his intent? Koutarou held back his negative thoughts and held hopes for Yurika’s future.

“…Satomi-san…”

Evening in Room 106

Yurika knew about Koutarou's past. She had heard Kiriha's interpretation of what he felt. As a result, Yurika knew what was going on inside of Koutarou.

I have to protect him…

A poor soul that had given up on the future because he had lost his mother was now desperately reaching for a bright future. That's why Yurika wanted to protect this small injured soul herself.

And if Satomi-san protects me too…

Yurika could use magic, but she wasn't all-powerful. No matter how much power she might have, she was still a normal girl. Fighting alone was hard, and lonely. Yurika felt like she could continue trying if she had someone by her side.

Above all, she believed that two people supporting one another was a wonderful thing.

"I… want to go to Kitsushou University. Together with Satomi-san and Sakuraba-senpai…"

That's why Yurika wanted to go to a university. She wanted support and be supported by Koutarou and Harumi, laugh together and live together. And of course with the invader girls as well. Right now, she felt like that was a wonderful future.

"Because, I love Satomi-san, Sakuraba-senpai and everyone…"

This was a first for Yurika. She wanted to live happily. She loved not just Koutarou and everyone. That's why she wanted to be with everyone.

It was a declaration of love towards everyone related to Yurika. This was something that she had been lacking a year ago. After one long year, she had finally obtained the nature necessary to be a magical girl.

"I see… that's good…"

Koutarou smiled and nodded at Yurika. He was happy for her choice, and felt relieved as well. Yurika wouldn't go away even after they graduate.

"Ehehe…"

Yurika's eyes moistened and she smiled embarrassingly.

The person she loved the most said that he wanted to be with her, and he had been happy when she said she wanted to be with him as well. There was nothing as happy as this. She felt happy that she had come here, from the bottom of her heart.

"Then come over here, Yurika."

Koutarou put away the pamphlets and beckoned over Yurika.

"O-Okay…"

Yurika blushed, and with her eyes still moist she crawled over towards Koutarou.

I misunderstood before… but this time… there's no misunderstanding, right…?

Koutarou's eyes were gentle. They both knew they treasured each other. And the time to confirm that feeling directly had come. In other words, it was time to kiss.

If it Satomi-san… no, I want it to be with Satomi-san… I don't want it to be with anyone else… it would be alright to kiss here… right?

Yurika's mind was full of what would happen. But unlike before, she wasn't becoming confused. Since she knew her feelings had reached, she didn't try to run away…

I… love this person…

Evening in Room 106

Yurika felt her heart being squeezed, she was sure of that feeling. Following her heart, she was now right in front of Koutarou. Now all she had to do was leave herself to that feeling.

“Alright, let’s start right away.”

However,

“Huh?”

Koutarou put a pen in Yurika’s hand and put down a book in front of her. With fire in his eyes, he loudly declared.

“You only faintly remember the multiplication table, right? We’ll start from here!”

Koutarou tapped the cover of the book.

‘Fun Mathematics for Second Grade of Elementary School’

The book in front of her was a collection of problems for grade schoolers. In contrast to Yurika’s expressions, Koutarou was planning on having Yurika study right away now that she had decided to continue her studies in a university.

“S-Satomi-san, c-can’t you treasure the moment a little more? Can’t you follow your heart!?”

Yurika had been in cloud nine, but was thrown right back into reality.

And that all too intense change caused Yurika to cry as she complained.

“It’s because you keep slacking like this that you’re in such a pitiful condition.”

However, Koutarou shook his head with a stern expression.

I’ll make her remember multiplication by today or tomorrow, and then during the rest of the week its division and fractions. But… it might still be too late. I have so much more I need to drive into her!

Koutarou burned with his athletic spirit. He was going to use any means possible to get Yurika into Kitsushou University.

“You’re wrong! That might be true normally, but right now, I am definitely the one who’s right!”

Yurika knew that she had to study, and that she had to begin as quickly as possible. But that wasn’t right now, at this time. Even if she had asked 100 people, Yurika was convinced that they would all agree with her.

“Quit whining and get to work! I’ll do them with you.”

But Koutarou refused to listen to her. He had already decided that he would get Yurika into Kitsushou University. That they would go together. And he was aiming for the shortest route there.

“This is wrong! There is definitely something wrong here!”

“It’s good for you to notice your own mistakes. So get on with it!”

“Hiii~!”

Yurika finally started moving her pen after Koutarou scolded her.

I might have fallen in love with a useless person… Wait, aaaahhh!? He is useless on his own!

As she did, Yurika noticed an important mistake she had made, but the damage was already done.

The Magical Girls' Morning

Part 1

Saturday, April 24

The next morning, when the invader girls came to room 106, they saw Yurika crying and prostrating.

"P-Please, forgive me already, Satomi-san! I know the multiplication table, so please, don't give me any more multiplication! No more!"

"Shut it, Yurika, what is seven times nine?"

"It's 63! Please, forgive me now, I feel like I'm going to go insane!"

"What's eight times five?"

"I-It's 40… Uuuhh~…"

Koutarou sat straight on the opposite of the table from Yurika with a stern expression while asking her questions from the collection of problems. Yurika, on the other hand, was completely exhausted and was desperately appealing to Koutarou to make him stop. However, Koutarou flat out ignored her and continued asking her questions. They had been doing this since last night.

The atmosphere around the two was bizarre. That alone was already surprising, but what surprised the invader girls the most wasn't that.

"Two times seven."

"14… Aaauuuu~"

"Yurika has mastered multiplications?! How?!"

"Just what happened after we left?!"

Everyone was well aware of Yurika's grades. She was so bad that they doubted she could even do extremely simple multiplication. And now, that Yurika had completely mastered the multiplication table. Sanae and Theia were astonished and watched over the two.

"How did he teach that Yurika multiplication in a single night? No, more importantly, just how did it turn into this after we left…?"

"It seems like some big misunderstanding happened…"

Shizuka and Ruth shared their sentiment. These two were wondering why Koutarou and Yurika were studying in the first place. They had expected Koutarou and Yurika's relationship to take a step forward, and as a result, the two would return to their usual selves.

"Please help me, please, Satomi-san won't… Satomi-san won't stop with his math drills!"

Yurika clung onto Kiriha and begged for help.

"Impossible. Once Satomi Koutarou has decided on something he will definitely go through with it."

However, Kiriha shook her head with a thin smile. She could vaguely imagine what had happened between the two.

She believed that because their relationship had progressed, there was now a need for Yurika to study. Going to a university or getting a job. Regardless of reason, since this was related to Koutarou's future, his determination carried a lot of weight. In that case, he wouldn't listen no matter what Kiriha said.

The Magical Girls' Morning

"No waaa~y."

Yurika cried and dropped her shoulders.

Yurika, you should notice that this is how Onii-chan expresses his love. What a waste…

The Kii inside of Kiriha began expressing her dissatisfaction. She was frustrated that Yurika hadn't noticed Koutarou's obvious expression of love. That's why she felt Yurika should notice that and enjoy it more.

And thus, the girls had all kinds of impressions regarding Koutarou and Yurika, but neither of the two noticed that and continued their practice.

"Five times four."

"Uhm—"

However, because she had stayed up all night, Yurika was exhausted and let her guard down now that the other invader girls had arrived, Yurika's answer was slightly delayed.

"20! You have to be able to answer something like this right away."

Sanae who had taken up her position on Koutarou's back answered before Yurika. Having had plenty of sleep, this kind of calculation was easy.

"You lost to Sanae, Yurika."

"I didn't get it wrong! I didn't get it wrong!"

"Yurika, an additional 20 as penalty."

"Kyaaaaaaa! Noooooooo!"

She had hoped her nightmare was going to end soon, but the end was nowhere near. Like this, Koutarou had been giving Yurika hope and then taking it away.

"Don't cry. It'll be over soon. It's just 20 more."

"That's what you've been saying since yesterday! But no matter how hard I try, it never ends! I don't want this anymoreeee!"

Yurika had been shown hope several times, and been given despair just as many times. As a result, the multiplication table had been carved into Yurika as a trauma she would never forget.

"S-Sorry, Yurika."

"…So that's how he's been teaching Yurika…"

"A living hell…"

"Once Satomi Koutarou has decided on something he won't stop after all."

"At this rate, Yurika-sama might be able to multiply two numbers in her head by tomorrow…"

While the girls pitied Yurika, they were a little envious that Koutarou was this into it.

"Come on, Yurika, quit spacing out, here's the next problem."

"Please! Make it stop!"

"'Tarou-kun has six boxes of tennis balls. In each of these boxes are four balls. How many balls are there in total?'"

"T-There are 24… I can't do this anymore! My head's about to explode!"

"Don't worry, Yurika. You're someone who can pull through when you need it."

"That gentle glance and trust look a lot more like a grudge right now!"

The Magical Girls' Morning

That was when the alarm of a clock that was near Yurika went off. It was now 9 in the morning.

"Satomi-san! That's it! It's over!"

Yurika picked up the alarm and showed it to Koutarou.

"Time's up huh…"

After confirming the time, Koutarou turned off the alarm.

Truth be told, Koutarou and Yurika had their own businesses to take care of today. Koutarou had promised some of his classmates to go play at an amusement park, and Yurika had promised to meet with Harumi. That's why if they didn't leave soon, they would be late.

"I guess it can't be helped. Yurika, the studying ends here for now. We'll continue later."

"I-I'm saved…"

Hearing those words, the exhausted Yurika collapsed on the tea table. She had to hurry and get ready, but she remained motionless.

"Oh, and I think you already know this, but come back before the curfew. If you break the curfew…"

A dangerous light could be seen in Koutarou's eyes.

"Hii!"

After leaving behind a short scream, Yurika ran out of the room in the blink of an eye.

"Koutarou."

"Hmm?"

"Yurika looks like you, you know?"

"What about her?"

"The part where she doesn't work for herself. The way she does and sees it is a little different though."

"I see… that might be true…"

Looking at Yurika as she escaped room 106, Koutarou thought to himself that just like he needed drastic treatment, then so might Yurika.

Part 2

Koutarou reached the station once the clock had passed 9:45AM. There was still some time left before the promised time of 10AM, so Koutarou decided to stroll through a nearby by bookstore.

"Oh, there it is."

Koutarou was visiting the bookstore to find some more teaching material for Yurika.

Yurika was only on the level of a second year grade schooler, and she was especially bad at math. Since she hadn't fully learned basic arithmetic operations, it was having a bad influence on her other subjects. For example, she couldn't make salt water at the requested density. In social studies, she couldn't properly convert yen to dollars. When told to calculate the average time on a 100 meter run in PE she didn't stand a chance, and while she was concerned about her weight, she couldn't properly do any calorie calculation.

The basis of all her problems was her poor math skills. Having determined that to be the case, Koutarou decided to start Yurika's education with math. As such, he was looking for some material for math.

"Third year math is still too early. But she has her pride… No, no, results are more important than her pride…"

"What are you doing, Satomi-kun?"

Maki appeared in front of Koutarou as he picked up a textbook. Instead of her normal school uniform, she was wearing casual clothes and gave off a soft impression. Maki was one of the people that Koutarou was going out to play with.

"Good morning, Aika-san. I was just thinking of making Yurika study a little."

Koutarou showed the collection of problems to Maki. Seeing the cover, Maki put a hand in front of her mouth and smiled a little.

"Yurika-san is bad at studying after all."

"That's why we're starting from the basics."

"Yurika-san's reading is a little spotty too."

"Really? What am I going to do with her…"

Koutarou and Maki went through books with problems for grade schoolers one after another and confirmed their contents. They were after problems that were within Yurika's reach. After finding some interesting books, Koutarou planned to pick them up on his way home from the amusement park.

Satomi-kun treasures Yurika…

That was what Maki felt as she glanced at Koutarou. There was no one that would go this far for just a classmate. This was proof that they were best friends, or maybe even something more. And he was thinking more about Yurika than Maki who was right next to him. This made Maki feel a little lonely.

Were these new clothes… for nothing…?

Maki looked down on the outfit she was wearing and let out a small sigh. She was wearing a brightly colored one piece dress with a lot frills. She also had a large ribbon as a hair accessory to go with her dress. Maki had done her best to make herself look as cute as possible, because she wanted to show a different side of herself to Koutarou. She then wanted him to at least say something. She didn't mind if it wasn't a compliment, she just wanted him to acknowledge that she looked different from normal. However, Koutarou was occupied with something different and

wasn't even looking at her. Maki felt lonely; it wasn't envy towards Yurika, but a loneliness because she had no place in Koutarou's mind.

"By the way, Aika-san."

"…Yes?"

Maki had dropped her shoulders and was looking down on the floor, only to look up when Koutarou called up to her. She saw him holding a collection of problems with his back turned towards her. That back made her feel even lonelier.

"You have an awfully cute feeling around you today, did you give up on your underhanded use of money?"

"Ah…"

Just those words from Koutarou was enough to blow Maki's loneliness away. In its place, her normal yearning for Koutarou filled her heart.

"…Why can't you just say that I look cute, Satomi-kun."

"Sorry. It seems that's my flaw. I've been hearing a lot about it recently. They tell me to quit trying to distance myself from others."

Keeping distance from others and not expecting anything from them was the flaw of Koutarou's personality that the invader girls pointed out. Even here, that flaw reared its face. But since he wanted to mend that flaw, Koutarou honestly apologized.

"Uhm, so in this case… you look cute today, Aika-san. That's suitable, right?"

"Satomi-kun…"

An unexpected image appeared in Maki's mind. She saw a young boy embracing a half-knit sweater. Maki hugged that boy in her mind and smiled at Koutarou.

"…You would have gotten full marks if not for your last question."

"You're so strict, Aika-san."

Koutarou turned towards Maki and smiled. As he did, an image floated up into his head for just a moment. But the smile he saw on Maki was so bright the image vanished before becoming clear.

"There has never been a moment in history where women haven't been strict."

"Yeah. You women are always strict, except during the most important times…"

Koutarou and Maki laughed together Maki was happy just being able to laugh together like this. Koutarou was smiling at her. There was nothing better than this.

However,

"Navy-san, you've already made a contract with a devil or something, haven't you?"

Maki remembered the words that Dark Green had spoken yesterday. In that moment, anxiety began spreading through her.

That's right, I have to confirm that…

Koutarou turned his back towards Maki and started looking through books again. Maki pointed her palm towards her back and mumbled something.

"…Analyze Magic."

It was a spell that analyzed the effects of magic. Maki wasn't wearing her magical girl outfit or holding her cane, but she could use simple spells even in this state. Maki was going to use this spell to examine herself and Koutarou.

It wasn't Green's misunderstanding… there really is a magical contract between us.

Maki wasn't specialized in information related spells like Green, so she couldn't detect the magic until she got closer to Koutarou. As a result, she had now been able to confirm the magical contract between herself and Koutarou.

This… really is from that time…

Maki had no recollection of forming a contract with someone herself. Which would mean that the other side, Koutarou, had formed the contract. And Maki had only one time in mind.

It was a few months ago during their ski trip. Maki had been seriously injured in the mountains, and had been healed by Koutarou using magic. But since Koutarou wasn't a magician, he had let his sword use its powerful magic. The sword emitted its pure white light and healed Maki's wound. And in that light, Maki had seen a single boy. A boy trembling in solitude. And Maki had told that boy, "It's okay, I'll always be with you…"

If that is the contract… everything would make sense…

Something similar happened to Koutarou, and as a result, a contract was formed. It was hard to imagine Koutarou forming a contract on purpose since he wasn't very knowledgeable about magic. It was likely that the sword had created the contract in order to save Maki.

"It's an equal and persistent contract with a mental connection between the parties… and there's no limit to the mutual assistance. It's almost like they're one the same. It's quite a drastic contract…"

But the contract that Green had mentioned worried Maki.

Do I really love Satomi-kun…?

Maki loved Koutarou. But now, she couldn't trust in her own feelings. Maki started doubting herself and wondered if her feelings were only due to the contract.

Up until now, Maki had felt like Koutarou was reading her mind several times. In everyday life and in battle. She thought that was because they had good compatibility. That's why she had begun feeling for Koutarou, thinking that they shared the same feelings and could fill each other's loneliness.

But if a contract existed between them, then that might not be the case. Their compatibility and her feelings for Koutarou might just be an illusion created by the contract.

Back then, Maki had completely given up on her life. Even if her wounds were healed, it wasn't sure if she would survive in that state. And with the mental wound from the past that Koutarou had, he probably wouldn't be able to stand having someone die in front of him.

In order for the two to live together, the sword formed a contract. It pushed them to treasure one another. Maki had been given hope, the treatment had succeeded and Koutarou's mind had been protected.

In other words, in order to save Maki and protect Koutarou, Maki might have been brainwashed.

If I annul this contract, that question would be answered, but…

There was a strong compulsion caused by the contract binding the two. The two were tied together forever and urged them to save one another. It was possible to annul that contract by going through the correct procedures. However, the safety and consent of both parties were the conditions.

If the contract was annulled, Maki would recover even if she was brainwashed. And by doing that, she would know if her current feelings were from her own intentions.

But if I am being brainwashed… should I really annul the contract? Even though Satomi-san might be killed by me…?

However, Maki hesitated to annul the contract.

She was scared that she might become someone else, worried that she might become Koutarou's enemy once more. That's why she wasn't trying to annul the contract right away.

If I'm not being brainwashed then I can just annul the contract… then I will know how I really feel…

While Maki feared brainwashing, she wanted to trust in her feelings. She wanted her love for Koutarou to be her own, rather than a construct by the contract.

But with the contract, her feelings would remain a doubt and she would probably always be uneasy. The only solution to this was to annul the contract and confirm it herself. That's why, for at least this purpose, Maki wanted to annul the contract.

…What should I do…

Maki continued worrying.

If she annulled the contract, she would know if her feelings were true or not. However, if she did, she might become Koutarou's enemy again. And once annulled, the contract wouldn't return. It wasn't an easy decision.

"Is something the matter, Aika-san?"

Koutarou called out to Maki as she worried. He found it strange that she suddenly fell silent.

"No, it's nothing at all."

Maki hurriedly smiled and shook her head. As she did, the ribbon on the back of her head swayed back and forth.

"…Satomi-kun, it's almost 10AM, let's go."

"Hm? Ah, yeah."

Maki grabbed the sleeve of Koutarou's shirt and led the way. At the same time, she kept her head low to keep Koutarou from seeing her face.

I have to return to my usual self before we get out of this store… I have to protect Satomi-kun today…

In the end, though she continued worrying, Maki decided to maintain her current state.

Even if her feelings were a product of a contract, changing into someone else was scary. And if she really was being brainwashed, the risk was too high. To Maki, keeping Koutarou out of harm's way took priority. That's why, as long as the possibility of her being brainwashed remained, she couldn't annul the contract.

I will definitely protect him. From any enemy… even if it's the original me…

It was because Maki had lived most of her life inside darkness, she didn't want to let go of the warmth she had within her reach, even if it was just an illusion.

Part 3

Sakuraba Harumi had to go to the hospital in the morning for a check-up. Yurika was tagging along with her, and once Harumi was done, the two would go out to play. They were expecting to go out to eat and shop.

"—and then, Satomi-san hit me."

"Fufu, if Satomi-kun hit you then you must have really skipped studying for a long time."

"Uuhhh?! T-T-That's…"

"Not true?"

"…No comment."

The two were currently talking in the waiting room at the hospital. Harumi's check-up was over, and all that was left was to pay. Because there were a lot of people that used this hospital, and because the calculations were complex, Harumi had to wait ten minutes every time before she could pay. The two were using that time to talk, but the topic naturally shifted to Koutarou.

"Anyways, Satomi-san is the one who's wrong. Satomi-san is fundamentally lacking in love towards me."

Yurika puffed her cheeks as she said that.

"Nijino-san, truth be told, you don't actually believe that, right?"

However, with just a single look at Yurika's face, Harumi had decided that Yurika wasn't telling the truth. While looking at her face, Harumi gently smiled.

"That's not true. Satomi-san is always violent and mean."

Yurika continued shaking her head.

"That's a lie. I don't believe it."

But even then, Harumi didn't believe Yurika's words.

"T-That's not true! Why would you think that?"

"Fufufu… that's because lately, you seem so happy whenever you talk about Satomi-san."

"Eeehh?!"

The moment Harumi pointed that out, Yurika started blushing. Seeing that change in expression, Harumi was convinced that her suspicion were true.

"You haven't noticed yourself? Even now, you sounded really happy when you said that Satomi-kun hit you… Even back when you mentioned your snacks being stolen, you sounded really cheerful."

Harumi had noticed that Yurika sounded really happy as of late whenever she spoke about Koutarou. Whenever she did, even if she seemed unhappy, her eyes were always laughing.

And during these past few weeks, there had been a big change. When Yurika spoke of Koutarou like she did in the past, she had a different atmosphere to her. She still seemed happy, but now her happy feelings seemed mixed.

"It's like I'm watching myself… that's why I can tell."

"…Auu…"

"Do you love Satomi-kun too, Nijino-san?"

The Magical Girls' Morning

Yurika was in love; that was what Harumi had concluded in almost no time at all, because she had been the same. Yurika had the same eyes that Harumi did when she would fix her hair in front of a mirror before going to her club activities.

"…"

The conclusion was clear, but Yurika was unable to answer right away. She was of course embarrassed, but the biggest reason was something else.

I've… fallen in love with the person Sakuraba-senpai loves…

At first, Yurika had been working to get Harumi and Koutarou together. She had consulted with Harumi and given her advice. But after time passed and she learned more about Koutarou, she fell in love with him herself. This was a big miscalculation for Yurika, and at the same time, the guilty truth. That's why Yurika couldn't reveal her own feelings to Harumi.

"You don't have to hide it, Nijino-san. I understand your feelings… and while they might not show it, I believe there are many girls that love Satomi-kun…"

Harumi had no intentions of blaming Yurika. To her, giving up on love because of the order in which people met or the order in which they fell in love with someone was too sad. She believed that everyone should have a fair chance. And because she found Satomi Koutarou to be attractive, she felt it was only obvious that Yurika would fall in love with him too.

"…Yes…"

Yurika felt so guilty she couldn't look at Harumi's face. However, she responded in a quiet voice and nodded her head ever so slightly.

"I see… that's great…"

Seeing that, Harumi happily nodded.

"Eh… great…?"

Yurika found Harumi's reaction strange and hurriedly looked up at her. As she did, she found Harumi looking at her with a gentle expression. And because Yurika wanted to know the meaning behind Harumi's words, she looked right back at her.

"Nijino-san… don't you think we're plain compared to many of the girls around Satomi-kun?"

However, what Harumi said, wasn't an answer to the question she asked; instead, Harumi answered with a different question. Yurika was somewhat confused, but she honestly answered the question.

"…Uhm… I think so…"

Yurika felt the same thing Harumi did.

Theia was a shining, strong and beautiful princess.

Kiriha was far more mature and wiser, and left the others behind when it came to femininity.

Sanae was honest and straight to the point. When it came to loveliness, she wouldn't lose to anyone.

Ruth was serious and single-minded. Though she had nothing that stood out, when all her positives were summed up, she was something that you could safely entrust your home to.

Not only was Shizuka an expert at martial arts, but she was a reliable person who managed Corona House on her own. Her bright character and gossip loving personality only helped to make her stand out more.

Just by thinking for a moment, Yurika could easily think of five attractive girls around Koutarou. Compared to them, only Yurika's bad sides stood out, and when looking at her good parts, she was only a plain girl.

The same could be said about Harumi. She was originally shy and weak to pressure. She had been improving as of late, but she was still introverted. As a result, she had a hard time expressing the deep love and kindness within her.

As a result, Yurika and Harumi were plain girls when it came to appealing to men.

"That's why… would you like to work together with me to make Satomi-kun turn our way?"

"Eeehhh…?"

That was all to an unexpected request. Harumi wanted to work together with Yurika to appeal to Koutarou. It was a surprising proposition, but for them it might be an effective means.

I see. That's why she said it was great…

That was when Yurika finally understood Harumi's intentions. Harumi knew that she was someone that didn't stand out, and that she was in need of improvement. That was when she learned of Yurika's true feelings. That's why she felt relieved and asked for Yurika's cooperation.

"If the two of us work together, I think we can, how do I say this… support the lonely part inside of Satomi-kun."

This might have been what was really important to Harumi. There was something she had always wondered about; why did a man like Koutarou join the knitting society? Harumi had been thinking about that the entire year. And just recently, she had reached a certain conclusion.

During their club activities, Koutarou had been excessively concerned with learning how to knit sweaters. In fact, when he first joined, he had mentioned sweaters. That's why Harumi started thinking that it held a great meaning to Koutarou.

Moreover, Koutarou would very rarely show an extremely lonely expression during their club activities. Since Koutarou had taken care not to show that expression, Harumi hadn't noticed until half a year later after he joined the society. Ever since then, whenever Harumi saw that face, she felt the need to do something.

Harumi began thinking that Koutarou's obsession with knitting sweaters had something to do with that loneliness. If those two were related, then Harumi would need help. She believed she couldn't heal his heart on her own.

"I think Satomi-kun has some sad memories about a sweater. That's why he is desperately trying to learn how to knit one despite being a boy. I can teach him how to knit, but my body is frail and I will be graduating next year. That's why I can't heal his loneliness. That's why I wanted you to help me, Nijino-san."

"…Sakuraba-senpai… you…"

Yurika truly believed that Harumi was amazing. Yurika knew of Koutarou's past thanks to Kiriha. The fact is that the half-knit sweater was a keepsake from his mother. But even then, she didn't notice how to heal Koutarou. However, Harumi who had no idea of Koutarou's past had found a way. Kiriha and the others had said that Yurika was closest to Koutarou, but in fact, the closest one of all was Harumi.

Satomi-san joined the knitting society because he wanted to finish his mother's half-knit sweater… That is probably to get his feelings in order… That's why Satomi-san won't be able to fully trust in others before it's complete… In that case, even if we get continue to get closer to

Satomi-san, we will eventually hit another wall! This is surely the piece of the puzzle we were missing!

At this moment, Yurika was the first of the girls around Koutarou to find a method to fully mend Koutarou's wounded heart.

In order to heal Koutarou's heart, the girls needed to give Koutarou their warmth in their own ways, while he had to complete his mother's sweater by his own hands. Like Harumi said, without both of these things, Koutarou can't be saved. He could only fully heal once he had both.

I can save him… No, if we all combine our powers, we can save Satomi-san…!

Up until now, Yurika had always been the one being saved, but now was her chance to save Koutarou. That conviction filled Yurika with a powerful sense of joy. Yurika was grateful for this chance. She might not have reached this conclusion if it wasn't for all the girls around Koutarou.

"I understand, Sakuraba-senpai! Let's start out with the two of us!"

Yurika decided to start out with her and Harumi. She would eventually need to explain the situation to all the girls of room 106, but Yurika felt like Harumi, who had reached this answer, deserved to lead the way. Harumi also had the handicap of not being involved with room 106.

"Thank you, Nijino-san!"

Harumi smiled happily. Nothing was as reassuring as having her closest friend support and help her. And she could be of help to the boy she loved. That's why her smile at this time looked like it belonged to a child.

"For the time being, I will join the knitting society! With that, we can maintain the minimum amount of people and preserve the society!"

According to school regulations, clubs required a minimum of four people, and societies a minimum of two. Since the knitting society was unable to get any new members, it would be shut down if no new members joined before April of next year. And if Koutarou's sweater wasn't completed before that time, things might become problematic. So in order to avoid that, Yurika decided to join the knitting society.

"Fufu… that's quite crafty of you, Nijino-san. It would be a big help if you did."

"But, but… won't I get in the way?"

Yurika had been keeping her distance from the knitting society in order to not get in the way of Koutarou and Harumi. From that viewpoint, having Yurika join the society would be undesirable.

"Not at all. I think it's more important to help Satomi-kun. And Nijino-san, we decided that we would work together, right?"

While Harumi might be troubled by having others join the knitting society because she would be unable to be alone with Koutarou, she had no problems with Yurika joining. If it was just Yurika, she could continue the same way she always had. If we she was with Yurika, she would be able to muster more courage to become bolder.

"Yes!"

Relieved, Yurika's eyes started sparkling. She was happy that she could be of help without getting in Harumi's way, in fact, she welcomed the situation. That was because Harumi was making up for Yurika's own faults.

"With this, I think we can have club activities even when I am in the hospital. I'm counting on you, Nijino-san."

"This Nijino Yurika will do her best!"

The Magical Girls' Morning

Harumi and Yurika smiled and continued chatting. The topics were friendship and love. They two were enjoying their lives to its fullest.

"…Oh, you two sound like you're having fun."

That was when someone called out to the two. Looking in the direction of the two, they saw a woman wearing an elegant suit.

"Kanae-san!"

"Nice to meet you, Higashihongan-san."

"What an unusual combination. May I join you?"

The woman's name was Higashihongan Kanae.

She was someone close to both Yurika and Harumi.

Darkness Rainbow

Part 1

Saturday, April 24

Harumi and Kanae first met a few years ago when Harumi was admitted. Back then, Sanae's condition was still light, so Harumi and Sanae were hospitalized in the same sickroom. That's why Harumi didn't just know Kanae, but also knew Sanae, though only the Sanae with the modest personality. After being released, Harumi would show up every so often to visit Sanae, and then she would also meet Kanae.

Kanae was currently in the hospital to pick up a few personal belongings left behind by Sanae. On her way back, she just happened to spot Harumi and Yurika.

Having finished their businesses, the three left the hospital and decided to eat lunch at a family restaurant. They were now done eating and were peacefully chatting.

"Hmm, so the two of you will be going after the same boy together… Girls nowadays sure are bold."

Kanae swirled her glass of iced coffee around while smiling elegantly.

"Going after…"

Kanae's frank expression made Harumi blush. Still in her late teens, Harumi didn't have the same level of confidence an adult had.

"Am I wrong?"

Kanae gave Harumi a teasing glance. She was enjoying seeing Harumi's innocent blushing.

"I don't think you're wrong, but… I feel like the nuance has changed…"

"Fufu, it hasn't changed… But I'm a little jealous. Friendship and love, huh… It's been a while since I talked about that myself…"

Kanae went through her memories and smiled nostalgically. She imagined herself shining in her teens and dreamed of going back to that time.

"About thirty years ago?"

However, she had only felt like teen for a few seconds. Yurika's oblivious and ruthless comment dragged her back to reality.

"Yurika-chan, are you picking a fight with me?"

Kanae smiled, but her eyes were twitching.

"N-Not at all!"

Yurika hurriedly shook her head.

I've done it! I've done it again!

Yurika knew that having a rich enemy was bad. And she was also scared of Koutarou's punishment. That's why she continued shaking her head as fast as she could.

"I came to pick a fight. Kanae."

That was when a new voice joined in. The voice belonged to a woman in her late twenties wearing an indigo suit. The moment they saw that woman, both Kanae and Yurika's expressions froze up.

"Long time no see, Kanae."

Darkness Rainbow

“Maya?! Why are you?!”

“This person is using magic… wait, Darkness Rainbow?!”

“Nice to meet you, Rainbow Yurika. My Maki is always in your care. I am Maki’s master, Maya.”

The woman that had appeared in front of Yurika and the others was Maya, a magician from Darkness Rainbow.

Part 2

Yurika's master, Nana, and her partner at the time, Kanae, had defeated Maya a few years ago. Back then, the injuries Maya had sustained were severe and she was no longer fit for battle. That's why her disciple, Maki, had taken up the name of Dark Navy.

"Maya… what is that body? …"

"You'll find out soon. Very soon."

However, Maya didn't seem to be under the effect of a serious injury. Her movements looked just the same as they had before to Kanae, not to mention she looked even younger than she did back then, as if she had grown younger these past few years. Kanae was more surprised by that than by Maya's sudden appearance.

"Nijino-san, what's going on? Who is that person? Why are we here?"

Harumi was even more confused than Kanae was.

After Maya had appeared, the group had moved to an abandoned building. While they directed hostility to one another, they exchanged harsh words.

Having suddenly been dragged into a dangerous world, Harumi couldn't do anything but be confused.

"Sakuraba-senpai, it's dangerous so please stay away."

"Dangerous… why?"

"A fight will start. That person is my and Kanae-san's enemy."

"Enemy?!"

Harumi thought that Yurika was joking, that she was only pretending that this was like her favorite anime. However, the atmosphere she felt was different. It was far too serious to be considered a joke. Yurika hadn't showed this serious of an expression, even during their plays.

Enemy… That person is Nijino-san and Kanae-san's enemy…

Harumi looked at Maya. Even she could feel an ominous presence coming from her. However, her common sense kept saying that it was all just a joke. Her sensation and common sense clashed, which only served to confuse Harumi even more.

"I will explain the details later. Please just do as I say, Sakuraba-senpai."

"O-Okay. I understand…"

Harumi did as Yurika said and got away from the other three. She didn't understand a thing, but she had no reason to doubt Yurika. After confirming that Harumi was at a safe distance, Yurika approached Kanae. Meanwhile, Kanae and Maya's discussion continued.

"Maya, let Sakuraba-san go. She is unrelated to this."

"Fufufu, I can't do that. I have my own circumstances here."

Maya refused Kanae's request, full of confidence. But on the inside, she was thinking something different.

On the surface she is a weak girl. However, her second personality holds a vast amount of power. Knowing that, there's no way I would just let her go, is there?

Maya had been given a report from Maki, so she knew of the power Harumi had. Based on Maya's objective, there was no way that she would set Harumi free.

"No matter what? Sakuraba-senpai is just a normal person."

Darkness Rainbow

Yurika came to Kanae's side and asked for Harumi to be let go.

Yurika didn't know of Harumi's power. That was because she had been unconscious when Harumi had shown her powers. That's why she tried to keep Harumi as far away from danger as possible.

"No matter what. No matter who that girl is."

But even then, Maya wouldn't let Harumi go. Maya fearlessly smiled as she tore off the clothes she was wearing, revealing a magical girl outfit that looked familiar to Kanae. But that familiarity ended there.

"Mode change, combat mode! Aura amplification rate to 1.5."

"Ready. Combat mode with aura amplification rate to 1.5 activated."

On Maya's command, her wrists began emitting an indigo glow as if she was wearing bracelets. At the same time, the lines that resembled tattoos began glowing with the same light and opened up a little. In that gap, very complex looking machinery could be seen. Most of Maya's body was now composed of machines.

"Maya?! Is that body—?!"

Seeing the machinery through the gaps in her body, Kanae realized how Maya had recovered. But she couldn't imagine that this could be done with modern science. It was a very shocking sight for Kanae.

"Are you jealous? I found a wonderful beauty salon. Aren't I beautiful?"

"A cyborg?! Kanae-san, get away! That's dangerous!"

Yurika warned Kanae who was standing still. In response, Kanae followed Yurika's advice and got some distance between herself and Maya. Thanks to her manga and anime, she understood the danger faster than Kanae.

"That's a good intuition! As expected from Nana's disciple I suppose!"

Maya grinned as her body changed even further. Various mechanisms popped out from the gaps forming on her body. Things such as exhaust tubes, armor and weapons appeared. Maya had thrown away her beautiful body and changed into a brutal combat machine.

"Come, Angel Halo! Encyclopedia!"

In return, Yurika called for her own canes.

Her intuition told her that if she didn't reveal her identity and held back on magic, she would have no chance of winning.

Part 3

Having transformed into a magical girl, the first thing Yurika did was to give Kanae a weapon and create a barrier.

“Armed — Encyclopedia!”

One of the two canes in Yurika’s hand transformed into a bow. Yurika then threw it to Kanae.

“Please use that, Kanae-san!”

“Thank you!”

Kanae easily caught the bow mid air and swiftly readied herself. As she did, the bow readjusted itself to perfectly suit Kanae.

It works the same way as with Nana-chan… I can fight with this!

Kanae then drew the bow and an arrow appeared out of nowhere. Kanae recalled her breathing from her previous battles and pointed the bow towards Maya.

“Sanctuary — Modifier — Effective Area — Colossal!”

At the same time, Yurika finished casting her barrier. With this, there was no need to worry about their fight being witnessed by anyone outside the building.

“Are the two of you ready yet?”

Despite having finished her own preparations, Maya waited for Yurika and Kanae to finish up their own. She did want to wait for the barrier to be put up, but the biggest reason for this was because she had absolute confidence in her own power.

She was convinced that there was no way she would lose to Kanae, who was growing weary from age, and Yurika, who was still immature.

“That confidence of yours will be fatal.”

“That might be true, if your partner had been Nana.”

The reason she had been defeated by Nana was because of her overconfidence in her power. Maya could honestly accept that.

“But you two are not as strong as the past Kanae and Nana. And besides—”

Maya took a stance.

As she did, a sound similar to a switch being pressed could be heard in several places on her body. That sound served as the gong to start the battle. It was the sound of the safety devices of Maya’s weapons being released.

“—I’m far stronger than I was before!”

Maya kicked off the ground. And in that moment, she disappeared from Yurika’s sight.

“She’s fast?!”

“Above you, Yurika-chan!”

Yurika had lost track of Maya, but Kanae who had excellent eyesight had not. As she warned Yurika, she released an arrow.

“You really are a little slower, Kanae!”

Maya kicked off the ceiling of the building and changed her direction. As a result, the arrow missed her.

Darkness Rainbow

“Should I introduce you to a good salon?!”

Maya had kicked off the ceiling and was now charging towards Kanae at a fierce speed. Maya greatly wounded her arm with a hand that transformed into a blade.

“I think I’ll pass!”

But Kanae wasn’t just going to let herself be done in. She swapped the bow from her left hand to her right and swung it. It handled similarly to a golf club.

“I’m still young after all!”

“My, that’s too bad!”

Maya’s right hand and Kanae’s bow collided. If Kanae’s weapon had been a normal bow, it probably would have been destroyed in that hit. However, since it was originally Encyclopedia, it endured the blow.

“Maybe you should lose a little weight instead!”

While retaining its bow form, Encyclopedia unleashed a spell. The bow read Kanae’s wish to blow Maya away and activated a shockwave spell.

“I’ll let the people who made my body know!”

But even the close range shockwave didn’t affect Maya’s confidence. Without even trying to dodge, she pointed her left arm towards Kanae.

The next moment, the shock wave crashed into the parts of Maya’s body covered in armor and dispersed. And at the same time, Maya fired the gun protruding from her left arm.

What Maya fired weren’t normal bullets, but bullets of indigo light. Energy was discharged directly from Maya’s body.

“Oh no?!”

Kanae hurriedly took evasive actions, but she was too close to dodge all of the fired bullets. At this rate, she would definitely be hit.

“Quick Cast! Force Field!”

But just before the bullets hit Kanae, a yellow shield of light appeared in the way of the bullets.

The shield of light blocked the majority of the bullets, but it was unable to withstand the barrage and the last remaining bullets continued flying towards Kanae.

However, thanks to Yurika buying her some time, Kanae barely managed to avoid the shots. She escaped with only one bullet grazing her cheek and another cutting off a few strands of hair.

“Oh… aren’t you working hard.”

Taking some distance once more, Maya seemed a little impressed as she looked at Kanae and Yurika, but her confidence remained the same.

“Please be careful, Kanae-san.”

“…Thank you, Yurika-chan.”

Yurika stepped forward to keep Maya in check. Meanwhile, Kanae got up and readied her bow again. As she did, the bow changed its shape and bowstring according to Kanae’s will.

It’s a little hard to draw, but if I don’t have enough power I won’t be able to hit her at that speed…

Maya was moving far faster than she had before. Maya was good at using magic to enhance her body’s abilities, but even back then she hadn’t been this fast.

Darkness Rainbow

"…What is this I wonder… I don't know what is up with her body and her weapons…"

Yurika held her cane and looked at Maya's body again.

Despite it not being her real body, she can still move that fluidly, and she moves at that speed without even using any magic. Her defense is quite impressive as well. And that weapon just now is strange… Not even a machine gun can break through a force field that easily… It probably isn't magic, but something else…

An overwhelming speed, attacks hard to defend against and strong defenses. Yurika could only think of one person with that kind of power.

"If I don't treat this as if I'm fighting against Satomi-san I'll be killed!"

Maya reminded Yurika of Koutarou. He had help from Sanae, and Kiriha's gauntlet and haniwas were— once Yurika reached that point in her thoughts she had an epiphany.

"I see! The underground people made your body, didn't they, Maya-san?!"

Yurika remembered the remains of the altar that Kanae had showed her yesterday. They were pieces of spiritual energy devices. If Maya had connections to the underground people back then, chances were high she still did now. And with the underground people's technology Maya's smooth movements and overwhelming speed could be explained.

"Hmm… I guess you're not as stupid as you look, just like Maki said…"

Maya's smile disappeared.

At the same time, several new weapons appeared on her body.

"But because of that, you now have to die."

Maya wanted to keep her connections to the underground people a secret.

But now that Yurika had found out the truth, she had to kill her or her relations with the underground people might worsen. Maya had been buying time up until now, but now her goal became to kill Yurika and the others. Playtime was over.

"Kanae-san, I'll raise your strength with magic! I'll leave the attacking to you!"

"Okay! I'll count on you to back me up!"

"Yes!"

Kanae dashed forward holding her bow. Yurika wouldn't be able to lock onto Maya, so she left the attacking to Kanae.

"Quick — And — Double Cast! Lightning Reflex, Mighty Power!"

Yurika enhanced Kanae's reflexes and strength with magic. With this, she would have an easier time keeping up with Maya, and she would be able to use her bow more easily. There were other parts she wanted to enhance as well, but since Maya was already making her move, even by forcibly speeding her spells up, two was her limit.

"How about this?!"

Kanae sent one arrow after another towards Maya. She could clearly see Maya and could more easily draw the bowstring. The fired arrows rushed straight towards Maya.

"Good, Kanae! It's like you've returned to how you used to be!"

"Automatic interception system activated. Beginning interception."

However, Maya wasn't without her own plans. Two antennas thrust up from her body and started firing powerful lightning bolts. Though the bolts didn't directly hit the arrows, the

electromagnetism they created had an effect on the metallic tips of the arrows. As a result, the arrows that were headed straight towards Maya veered off course and missed.

“But you’re still a bit off! You really have gotten old, Kanae!”

“It’s not over yet!”

In that moment, the bow in Kanae’s hand greatly changed its shape. As the bow returned to its original form of a cane, Kanae swung it. Kanae was skilled with both bows and naginatas. Kanae was going to fight against Maya using the cane as a replacement for a naginata.

“I see, so you have more weapons than before!”

In response, Maya fired the gun on her left arm while charging in.

“Protection From Soul Energy!”

But this time, the bullets were completely blocked by Yurika’s defensive spell. Knowing that she was going up against the underground people’s technology, she realized that protection from spiritual energy would be more effective than protection from physical attacks.

“Haaaaaaaaaa!”

“Daaaaaaaaaa!”

Maya and Kanae clashed, and the blade in Maya’s right hand crashed into Kanae’s cane.

Kanae’s cane was made out of wood, but thanks to the magic power inside, it was harder than steel. As a result, the cane successfully blocked Maya’s blade. But her strike was heavy, and so was Maya’s body, thanks to all the machinery in her. What’s more, her speed was abnormal. Because of that, Kanae couldn’t hold off the blow despite being strengthened by Yurika’s magic.

“I’ve got you, Kaanaeee!”

With Kanae being blown upwards, Maya unleashed a kick with her long legs.

A blade appeared at her foot, just like with her hand. Maya was planning on finishing off Kanae with this attack.

“Quick Cast — Push!”

“Kyaa?!”

But before Maya’s leg could reach, Kanae was blown away by Yurika’s spell. Thanks to that, Maya ended up missing completely.

“Cane, please!”

Kanae then used the cane’s magic to make a soft landing. But despite having survived the crisis, Kanae’s expression was severe.

She’s strong… and her attack pattern is completely different from the past… If I let my guard down for a moment, I will die!

The cane transformed into a bow once more. Kanae wanted to wipe the sweat off her forehead away, but she wasn’t given the time to do so.

Part 4

The battle continued in Maya's favor. She could attack any way she pleased thanks to the many weapons she had, and though Yurika and Kanae had the numerical advantage, they were forced to defend themselves. Harumi knew next to nothing about fighting, but even she could tell that Yurika and Kanae were being driven into a corner.

"What is going on…? Just who are Nijino-san and Higashihongan-san…?"

Harumi was overwhelmed by the spectacle taking place in front of her eyes.

A battle had suddenly started, and she had no idea why. She was confused by the woman with the mechanical body, and Kanae who fought against her. But what confused her the most was Yurika's appearance.

"It's like she's a real magician… Wasn't that supposed to be just cosplay…?"

As Yurika fought, she looked just like a magical girl that would appear on an anime. And for every time they swung their arms, the earth tore up and the air was burnt and scorched. It was obvious that this wasn't some kind of special effect. With a spectacle that ignored common sense like this playing out in front of her, Harumi started question if this was even real.

"…Huh…?"

That was when a doubt floated up in Harumi's mind. It was a sensation of deja vu.

Haven't I seen something like this before…?

A faint memory appeared in her mind. It was the sight of Yurika fighting against a girl in an indigo outfit. However, that memory was very hazy and she couldn't remember it very well. But she could somehow feel that the memory she had was of something that had happened in the past.

What is this… I feel like I'm forgetting something important…?

Harumi began focusing on her own mind, searching through her memories, trying to recall that vague memory.

It wasn't this year. It was probably after the first play… I talked to Nijino-san and Satomi-kun, and then we, all of us and Matsudaira-san, went out to play… No… Was it a little before that?

Based on her own sensations, the clothes worn at the time and her surroundings, Harumi got a feel for roughly when it had happened. And using that as her guide, Harumi's memories gradually started getting clearer.

That's right… Back then, this woman… No, not her, it was probably a different girl with similar clothes… I was kidnapped by that girl, and was unable to move…

Something was glowing on Harumi's forehead, and it started glowing brighter the clearer her memory got. That pure-white glow turned into a torrent of magical power and was trying to break the spell put on Harumi's memory to pieces.

And then…

Harumi could remember a large fireball. At the same time, a fireball appeared in reality as well.

"I don't know what you're planning, but I won't let you do anything!"

Maya created a fireball just like Maki had in Harumi's memories. Maya sensed the magical power that Harumi was releasing and made the first move to keep Harumi from interrupting her fight with Yurika and Kanae.

"Run away, Sakuraba-senpai!"

Darkness Rainbow

Yurika shouted. It was a situation very similar to last time, but this time, Yurika had just cast a spell and was now unable to protect Harumi. And since the attack this time around wasn't magic, Maya was far faster than Maki had been. Moreover, Kanae couldn't stop Maya's attack from her position. At this rate, Harumi's life was in danger.

"…Good bye, young lady."

In the end, Yurika's warning hadn't been quick enough. Harumi wasn't a magician, and she didn't have the ability nor the will to fight. Being just a normal girl, Harumi simply stood there with a blank stare.

"Sakuraba-senpaaaaiiii!"

And then I was swallowed by crimson flames.

Part 5

Darkness Rainbow wasn’t just after Yurika. Dark Green and Dark Crimson were planning on attacking room 106 of Corona House.

Darkness Rainbow

Darkness Rainbow's main goal was to seize the magic power concentrated in room 106. Maya's attack on Yurika was a diversion to stall for time. This room was their real goal.

"Are you ready, Green?"

"Yes. My forecast is telling me to watch out for a girl with golden hair that uses the key word 'Blue Knight.' I can see a multitude of different attacks stemming from that. And one more warning."

"What?"

"Don't enjoy your battle with the girl wearing an apron too much. If you got too into it, I can see several futures where you get the rug pulled out from under you."

"Okay, okay. Despite your calm looking expression, you're quite harsh…"

After invading the premises of Corona House, Crimson and Green released the spell that concealed them. They had already put up a barrier to keep people away so there was no need for them to worry about being spotted.

"Crimson, take a step to your right quickly."

"Okay, okay, you're so demanding…"

The two of them both took a single step to the right, and that was when it happened.

A beam of light appeared just where they had been standing. The light carved a large hole into the ground and the shockwave created from the heated air greatly shook the two.

"Kyaaaaa?! What's going on?!"

"…It's the enemy's attack. They noticed us approaching when we put up the barrier."

Having predicted the enemy's attack, Green simply shook from the enemy's overhead laser attack, but Crimson lost her balance. She then hurriedly rebalanced herself and complained to Green.

"Let me know those important things sooner!"

"It's okay. We'll be using a mental link from now on."

As Green activated a new spell, the people that had attacked them appeared. They were five girls around the same age as Green and Crimson.

"Oh… to think you would dodge that… How interesting."

"Your highness, this is strange. According to the observed data, these two took evasive action just before the weapon was fired."

"But it doesn't look like they sensed an aura."

"Then did they wiretap us? How rude, I'll have to call the operator…"

"If they wiretapped us, they probably would have moved sooner. It seems like it's something different."

Theia, Ruth, Sanae, Shizuka and Kiriha. The five girls of room 106 stood in Crimson and Green's way, ready for a fight.

"But should we really have attacked out of nowhere?"

"No problems. They couldn't be anything than enemies in this situation."

Sanae was worried about having attacked right away, but Theia had made a grounded decision. There had been signs that informed her of their raid.

First, all signals between Koutarou's bracelet and the Blue Knight, except for the signal that used gravitational waves, had been suddenly cut off. Finding that strange, Ruth investigated the situation and found that most communications methods around Koutarou had been cut off. They had also lost contact with Yurika. In that situation, communications in Corona House had been disrupted as well. And at the same time, two girls had snuck into the premises of Corona House. This had all been circumstantial evidence, but Theia made the call that they weren't friendly and used the Blue Knight to attack without hesitation.

"I like that swift decision of yours."

Crimson smiled. A fire started in her eyes, she was excited to fight against a powerful opponent.

"Of course. Those are the basics of battle. Make a preemptive strike with overwhelming force. It's your own fault for carelessly approaching after such an imperfect diversion… How ungraceful."

Theia smiled elegantly and covered her mouth with an even more elegant folding fan. Enraged by Theia's behavior, Crimson readied her cane and roared.

"Then I'll turn you into cinders right now! I'll make you regret talking down to me!"

Crimson was conscious of her own error. She also felt ashamed for her ungraceful appearance during the bombardment. So having Theia throw some harsh words towards her, Crimson's blood started to boil.

"Calm down, Crimson."

"But…"

"I understand how you feel, but don't fall for their provocation. That girl is very calculating."

"Uhh… O-Okay…"

But with Dark Green's calm words, Crimson barely managed to hold herself back. Seeing that, Theia closed her fan and erased her sarcastic smile.

"I see… so that's the kind of combination you two have…"

Like Green said, Theia was simply trying to provoke them. She was no longer the type of person that would aggravate others for no reason. Skilled in battles, Theia was trying to extract info from Crimson by provoking her.

They're unknowns, but I've figured out a bit… These people really are behind the diversions… The green one is in charge of information, and the red one can use high energy attacks. The reckless red is being controlled by the calm green. Based on this relation, the green one is the leader… and then there's that cane that the red one was going to attack with… Surely that can't be a magical cane, can it…?

This brief exchange of words had been enough for Theia to obtain a lot of information. Upon analyzing the information, Theia reached a certain conclusion. To confirm it, she asked Kiriha who was by her side.

"Kiriha, what do you think?"

"I believe I have reached the same conclusion as you, Theia-dono. Sadly, I cannot think of anything else."

"I see… so they really are…"

Theia grinded her teeth. If Theia and Kiriha were right, the two in front of them wouldn't be foes they could so easily deal with.

"What do you mean, Theia-chan?"

Shizuka who hadn't understood asked Theia.

"…Those two are magicians."

"Eeeehhh?!"

"You're kidding?!"

Shizuka and Sanae's eyes opened wide in surprise. Even Ruth who was behind them was surprised.

"Your highness, are you sure?!"

"…You might think that I am being foolish, but I am almost completely convinced. They are like Yurika, in a good way."

Like Yurika in a good way. That meant that they had the same kind of power Yurika had when she had saved Sanae from her crisis. It meant that they could use magic.

In other words—

"Our enemies are magical girls. If you look down on them thinking they're just cosplayers, you're in for a world of hurt."

—It meant that they were troublesome enemies that could fight in an abundance of ways.

Part 6

Theia had reached conclusion that the two were magical girls because of their canes and the situation.

Both of them had canes of different shapes. The interference in Corona House very closely resembled the barrier that Yurika had put up using Encyclopedia. On top of that, the cloak they had used to approach was incredibly advanced and had allowed them to slip past all of the sensors that Theia and Ruth had set up. It was hard to believe that could be possible with the current level of technology on Earth.

Koutarou had brought Yurika's cane in from another world, but it worked without any problems in this world as well. That meant that the laws of physics allowed for the existence of magic. In that case, it wouldn't be strange for there to be real magicians.

With this, it meant that either the two were magicians, or they had science advanced enough to deceive Forthorthe's sensors. Either way, it was clear that they were dangerous. And in the worst case scenario, them being magical girls was the most dangerous. Based on Yurika's past efforts, it was more troublesome going up against magic that could be used for all kinds of things rather than Forthorthe's technology that became a lot more limited in a battle.

"That's right. You will all be defeated by our magic."

With a confident smile, Crimson readied her cane. As she did, the crimson outfit she was wearing began to emit a faint red glow, making it look like she was on fire.

"But it's nothing personal… Green, are you ready?"

"Yes. The first attack will come in 33 seconds."

Green silently nodded. However, her voice reached Crimson. This was thanks to a telepathy spell.

"What kind of attack?"

"The girl in the apron will lead the attack."

When Green readied her cane, several holograms appeared around her. The holograms displayed characters and images, and it looked very similar to the holograms Clan could produce with her bracelet.

"An enemy that can do what Yurika-chan did back then, huh… then I will lead the way. Everyone else please back me up."

"Shizuka, I'll help too!"

"We're counting on you, Shizuka, Sanae. Blue Knight, auto select using the anti-personnel laser as the starting point."

"As you wish, my princess."

"Karama, Korama, change the settings on the Spiritual Energy Field, raise its resistance towards elemental attacks as much as you can. I will permit the use of spiritual energy weapons. Release your limits, I will allow you to force yourselves to the point that you break if need be."

"Understood Ho-!"

"Leave it to us Ho-!"

"We're going up against enemies we know nothing about! Everyone, please don't push yourselves too much until I can gather the necessary data!"

Darkness Rainbow

Shizuka was the vanguard with Sanae backing her up with her spiritual powers. Theia would be shooting from a distance to make the best use of her firepower. Kiriha took charge while her high mobility haniwas would cover everyone. And Ruth stayed in the back to gather and analyze data.

I just hope this is good enough…

It was a sturdy and the strongest possible formation, but even then Kiriha felt like it was lacking. Based on her own experiences of using Encyclopedia, Kiriha knew just how flexible magic was.

“Are you just about ready yet?”

“…Don’t play around too much, Crimson.”

As proof of that, despite standing in front of five, Crimson and Green were still confident. They had no doubt that they would win.

Part 7

The invader girls made the first move.

“Here I go!”

With her exceptional physical strength and speed, her hair, apron and skirt swayed as she rapidly approached the enemy vanguard, Crimson.

“Shizuka, I couldn’t strengthen your body as well as Koutarou’s, so don’t get overconfident!”

“I got it, thank you Sanae-chan!”

As Sanae said that from the rear, Shizuka kicked off the ground and jumped. With her body strengthened even further by Sanae’s spiritual energy, she shot through the air like a bullet. Shizuka then lightly rotated mid-air and thrust out her right leg. She flew towards Crimson, trying to hit her with a jump kick.

“Child’s play!”

“That kick is just a diversion. The real attack is a ranged attack afterwards, counter attack after you’ve dodged that.”

“Got it!”

As Shizuka’s kick approached, Crimson took a mysterious step. After parting from Shizuka for a moment, Crimson stepped forward again as if she was going around her.

The next moment a laser passed through the area where she had been standing. This laser was fired from a weapon that Theia had summoned.

“It’s not over yet! Sanae-chan God Arrow— wait, what?!”

As Sanae was about to attack because Theia’s attack had missed, many Crimsons appeared in the area. Surprised by that, Sanae’s attack was delayed for a moment.

“Crimson, attacks won’t come from this position.”

“Hmm, then let’s start the counter attack!”

Several dozen Crimsons then readied their canes all at the same time.

“Oh no?!”

Shizuka who had missed her kick was trying to land curled up and crossed her arms, bracing for Crimson’s attack. She knew that she was the target thanks to the power to see the intention to attack, given to her by Sanae.

“Sanae, they’re just holograms! Just attack!”

“Okay!”

Sanae fired an arrow from her bow made out of spiritual energy. That arrow was also made out of spiritual energy so it split into several dozen smaller arrows midair and assaulted the crowd of Crimsons.

“They’re all fakes?!”

All the Crimsons hit by Sanae’s arrows disappeared entirely. As Theia had said, they were all illusions created by Green. But, there were so many holograms that Sanae couldn’t get rid of all of them. And the real Crimson was still present amongst them.

“Infernal Fire — Modifier — High Concentration.”

Three Crimsons remained, and all three of them made the exact same movements and produced a large burning red ball of flame each. That large ball then contracted and shrank to the size of a tennis ball. This increased the heat of the fireball, and it shone like a miniature sun.

“Take this!”

And those three fireballs were all sent towards Shizuka.

“Kya Kya Kya!”

Shizuka didn’t know which one was real. Moreover, she had just landed and couldn’t move away in time. That’s why all she could do was let out a scream.

“Karama, Korama!”

“Leave it to us Ho-!”

“Shizuka-chan, you can take it easy Ho-!”

Just before the fireballs were about to hit Shizuka, Karama and Korama appeared in front of her. They then pointed their arms forwards and emitted a yellow light. That light turned into a large membrane that enveloped Shizuka and the haniwas.

The moment the fireballs crashed into the haniwas’ membrane of light, a large explosion occurred. The shock wave from the explosion caused the entirety of Corona House to tremble. Because of the explosion, Shizuka and the haniwas were wrapped in flames and their appearance couldn’t be seen from the outside.

“*cough* *cough, cough*”

“Shizuka-chan, quickly fall back Ho-”

“I know, but, *cough*”

“This way Ho-”

Fortunately, Shizuka and the haniwas appeared shortly after again. The haniwas were bringing Shizuka back to Theia as she was having a coughing fit. Both Shizuka and the haniwas were a bit dirty from the explosion, but they had no injuries.

“…I think we’re a strange bunch, but you might be even more so. Normally at least one person would die from that.”

Crimson gave words of praise to Shizuka who had safely gotten out of her pinch. Infernal Fire was one of Crimson’s strongest attacks, so taking a direct hit from that and being unharmed was quite surprising.

But she didn’t stop at being surprised, and while she was praising Shizuka, she communicated with Green without the use of words.

“Green, what’s next?”

“The next is in 18 seconds. Those cute machines will try something.”

“Let me know when you get more details.”

“Ok.”

Crimson and Green were confident that they would win, but that was if they could work together without making any mistakes. The two couldn’t afford to let their guard down.

“Your highness, this really is strange. The enemy is moving to where our attacks won’t hit just before they’re fired. It’s as if they know where the attacks will come to begin with.”

“But they’re not reading our auras. I can’t feel that they’re using spiritual energy at all.”

“Could it be profiling?”

“No… I can’t imagine our opponents have enough information on us to do that. It would make more sense to suspect magic is playing a hand in this. I don’t know if they’re reading our minds or auras though…”

At the same time, the invader girls worked on improving their cooperation against the two unknown enemies. They realized that they had no chance of winning if they all fought on their own.

“Karama, Korama, don’t let them get close.”

“Roger Ho-”

“Leave it to us Ho-”

“Blue Knight, keep them restrained. Put interception on auto reaction.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

The two got back into formation and tried to keep the two magical girls at bay while planning their strategy. If their attacks were being read, they couldn’t carelessly go on the offensive. Meanwhile, the two magical girls weren’t taking the offensive either. They were waiting for the invader girls to show an opening while blocking Karama, Korama and the Blue Knight’s attacks.

“…Uhm, can I say something stupid?”

Shizuka dusted off her clothes while speaking coyly.

“Go ahead. I am willing to try any plan.”

Theia nodded seriously. She was ready to try anything.

“Those girls are magicians, right?”

“That’s right. There’s no doubting that.”

Kiriha said that. The fireball that Crimson had fired from her cane all but proved that they were magicians. As the fireball was being generated, Karama’s, Korama’s and the Blue Knight’s gathered data revealed that it wasn’t being created by science or spiritual energy.

“Then… can’t they just see the future in a crystal ball like the witches from fairy tales?”

“Future forecast!”

Shizuka had embarrassingly spoken out, prepared to made fun of, but Kiriha and Theia did no such thing. Instead, their eyes opened wide and looked at each other.

“Kiriha, what are the chances?!”

“It can’t be dismissed.”

Kiriha figured that since Koutarou had travelled through time, it must be possible to obtain information from the future in some way. The problem was whether it actually could be done or not.

“…We have to confirm how they are reading our moves, and including the possibility of future forecast.”

“Then what do we do?”

“That’s—”

Kiriha swiftly gathered her thoughts and conveyed them to her allies. The girls all moved out, following Kiriha’s directions. Sensing that, a grin appeared on Crimson’s face.

Darkness Rainbow

“Looks like they’re finally getting motivated. Finally, I was getting bored of playing with these toys.”

“The girl with the golden hair will make the first move by summoning another machine. Don’t get too surprised, because a large amount of small missiles will come flying at you. They follow heat sources so after they lock onto you, use Flare to avoid them.”

“Really, how many surprises do those girls have? Multiple Energy Bolt!”

While listening to what Green was saying, Crimson attacked the haniwas flying in the air with energy balls created by magic. However, since the haniwas stopped their attack and began falling back, the energy ball missed and continued flying forward until it could no longer be seen. And in the next moment, Theia made her move.

“Let’s do this! Blue Knight! Anti-personnel multi-missile!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Space-time holes opened up on both sides near Theia, and a big box appeared from each hole. The box was about a meter and a half tall and it had a quite squarish design for something from Forthorthe.

“Target locked, beginning attack.”

As the Blue Knight’s AI signaled, the boxes opened and revealed 16 missiles about 50 centimeters in length.

The missiles all began spewing out fire at the same time and flew out of the box. The missiles flew straight up for a moment before turning towards the two magical girls at once.

“Here I go!”

As the missiles changed direction, Shizuka started running. While their enemies were intercepting the missiles, she was going to close in on them.

“Flare!”

Crimson held her cane above her head and chanted a short incantation. As she did, a bright glowing ball of light appeared between her and the missiles.

The missiles misidentified the light as their target and started following it. Crimson manipulated the ball of light to send the missiles of in a random direction. The missiles continued chasing after the ball of light and flew off somewhere.

“Now it’s my turn!”

Shizuka who had approached Crimson while she was dealing with the missiles launched her attack while keeping her momentum.

“I’ve been waiting!”

Crimson held her cane in both hands and moved up to intercept Shizuka. To Crimson who only sought after strength, having a close quarter fight was a welcome event.

“You don’t need to.”

“Kyaaaaaa!”

Just a moment before Crimson’s battle would start, the soil by Shizuka’s foot sunk down. Since Shizuka was just about to take a step she lost her balance.

“Hey Green, let me have some fun too!”

“Only once we’ve thinned their numbers a little.”

“You better mean it!”

As Crimson was complaining to Green, Shizuka rolled by at a terrific speed. Because she had fallen properly, she hadn’t taken any serious damage, but she lost her breath and was unable to move.

“Seriously… I hate these kind of throwaway matches the most…”

Crimson jumped towards Shizuka while she was unable to move. Crimson then pointed her feet down and fell towards Shizuka. She was going to finish off Shizuka while she was unable to move by slamming her feet into Shizuka’s stomach.

“Bend your legs, Crimson.”

“Alright.”

“Look out, Shizuka!”

But the spiritual energy arrow that Sanae had fired barely managed to save Shizuka. Since Crimson had to bend her legs to avoid Sanae’s attack, a slight delay occurred in her attack. During that time, Shizuka rolled out of the way and managed to avoid the attack with just her side being grazed.

“Fall back to three meters behind me.”

“Okay, okay, boy we sure are busy, aren’t we?”

“Blue Knight, pull the enemy away from Shizuka! I’ll leave the method of attacking to you!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

The weapon that Theia had summoned from the Blue Knight spewed a large amount of bullets between Shizuka and Crimson. However, since Crimson had already moved to evade, the bullets never hit. And like that, Crimson fell back even further alongside with Green.

“So she did avoid it!”

Despite the attack simply being dodged, Kiriha’s expression distorted in astonishment. In fact, Theia’s attack had revealed an important truth.

“Ruth, how does it look?!”

“They are just barely outside of the Blue knight’s set attack radius. It’s like they’ve analyzed the Blue Knight’s combat algorithms!”

All the attacks up until this point had been performed with a certain intention.

For example, the missiles were to find out if the girls were really using magic to find out what they were doing. Since the missiles had many different methods of tracking, they were testing to see if they would use the correct counter measures, revealing if their attacks were being read in some fashion. And in fact, Crimson and Green had correctly used heat to deal with the missiles. If they didn’t know what kind of tracking method the missiles used, it would make sense to use magic to protect themselves, so this revealed that their moves were being read somehow.

And the most important attack was Theia’s last. Theia had left everything to the Blue Knight. In other words, if the magical girls had been using magic to read their minds or intention to attack, they shouldn’t have been able to avoid this attack. And yet, Crimson and Green had accurately fallen back to outside of the Blue Knight’s attack radius. It was hard to think that the Blue Knight’s attack systems had been analyzed in this short amount of time, which left very few possibilities.

“Green, looks like they’ve found out.”

“So it seems. A large amount of forecasts just disappeared.”

Darkness Rainbow

Despite having their opponents find out about the secret to their strength, Crimson and Green were still confident. The two simply smiled as they stood in front of the five astonished girls.

“I didn’t think it was possible, but… you are reading the future…”

“That’s right. So just give up and die.”

It was only obvious that they would remain confident.

The two of them knew that their advantage wouldn’t disappear just from having their secret revealed.

Contract and Descent

Part 1

Saturday, April 24

Koutarou and Maki's names were displayed on a screen showing today's top ten high scores by the exit of an attraction. The attraction was similar to a game where groups of two get on a ride and compete over who can kill the most monsters. Koutarou and Maki had gone together and managed to get the top score by a large margin.

"…Hey, Kou. Don't you feel anything after seeing this result?"

Looking up on the screen that was brilliantly displaying 'Koutarou & Maki' at the top of the leaderboard, Kenji dropped his shoulders in amazement.

"Feel anything? What do you mean?"

"This is what I'm talking about… you're always like this…"

Kenji put his hand on the confused Koutarou's shoulder and lost all will to speak. To Kenji, having a feminine girl like Maki go all out on an attraction like this, it looked like Maki was sending special signals. However, Koutarou couldn't feel that, or he could have been intentionally ignoring it.

"Satomi-kun and Aika-san should just stop beating around the bush and date already. Having two people this synced up is very rare."

"I think so too. It feels like fate."

Kenji and a group of girls all shared the same opinion that since Koutarou and Maki were so compatible, they should just start dating. The group of girls had gossiped about the special atmosphere between Koutarou and Maki several times in the past as well. And with their score on the attraction only fueling the flames, they decided that now was the time to match up the two.

"What do you think about that, Maki-chan?"

"Even if you ask me… uhm… I'm just always after money, so…"

Maki's face turned red as she blushed. Her feelings were already clear to herself.

"Oh? She doesn't seem to be against it? Oh you…"

"…"

Having her sides nudged by her classmate's elbow, Maki instinctively looked at Koutarou. As she did, her eyes met with Koutarou's.

"…Uhm… I…"

"Y-Yeah…"

Koutarou had a perplexed expression at first, but when he saw Maki's eyes, his expression was replaced with a smile.

She's certainly a girl that has a different feel to her compared to the other girls…

Whenever Koutarou would look at Maki, he felt a mysterious feeling. He felt a sense of duty that demanded that he protect her. At the same time, he felt a sense of trust that she would value the same things he did. Koutarou didn't know what made him feel that way, but the feeling was far from unpleasant. It might be the same thing that Koutarou feels for the invader girls. And the fact that he felt this about just a classmate confused Koutarou.

Contract and Descent

She's just a normal classmate, but could it be because we share a secret…?

The only reason Koutarou could think off was when he had saved her life at the mountain. He vaguely felt that might be the reason.

"I won't accept this! Aika-san can't go out with Satomi!"

"Yeah! The guy who betrayed the unpopular boys alliance can't find happiness!"

But that was as long as Koutarou and Maki could look at each other. The dissatisfaction amongst the boys of the group exploded and they blew away the sweet atmosphere between the two.

"I am Maki-chan's fated person! Stop spewing your selfish crap, women!"

"Are you guys stupid?! Just accept that score as reality!"

"No, it's a mistake! As if something digital like that could measure bonds and fate!"

"What you're saying is a sound argument, but you only look like an idiot right now!"

The quarrel grew more intense, leaving out the two in question entirely. Koutarou felt like he had been left behind. He found that funnier and funnier, until he started laughing.

"Haha."

"Fufufu."

As he laughed, a quiet laugh came from next to him. When Koutarou looked in that direction, he saw Maki laughing. Their eyes met and Maki's eyes narrowed. That was when Koutarou was convinced that she was feeling the same thing as he was.

What is this, really…?

It was a mysterious feeling. And the fact was Maki made him feel comfortable. That's why Koutarou could accept that to him, Maki is an important existence.

A muffled buzzing sound could be heard. Maki had received a mail on her phone.

Part 2

The mail Maki had gotten was very short. The subject said ‘Commencing action’ and there was no text. The mail had been sent according to a prior decision, which is why Maki knew what was happening just by reading the subject.

So it’s starting…

The mail indicated that Maki’s allies were on the move. Maki’s job was to keep Koutarou here until her allies were done with their jobs. Keeping Koutarou, who was considered their strongest foe here, and away from the action, was Maki’s job. And Maki felt a significant meaning in this. She didn’t want Koutarou to fight with anyone. It wasn’t just that she was worried he might lose his life, but she also didn’t want him to be dirtied by being exposed to his enemy’s malice.

But… is this really alright…

However, Maki didn’t feel satisfied by that. She felt like she was betraying Koutarou in a way. If Koutarou learned of what was going on, he would surely try to resolve it. And despite knowing that, Maki couldn’t tell Koutarou the truth. That was to protect Koutarou, but it went against his wishes. That’s why she couldn’t quite accept what she was doing.

I don’t know what’s right and what’s wrong… Is this because of the contract too?

What disturbed Maki even more was the contract between her and Koutarou. Since they had a mental connection because of the contract, Maki tended to give priority to Koutarou’s intentions. That’s why although she herself prioritized Koutarou’s safety, there was a chance that the contract prioritized Koutarou’s intentions and imprinted those onto Maki.

Such various circumstances confused Maki. That’s why she blankly stared at her cellphone’s screen.

And as she did, she could hear the sound of a cell phone vibrating again. But that cellphone didn’t belong to Maki, but to Koutarou.

What was actually vibrating wasn’t a cellphone, but the bracelet on Koutarou’s right wrist. Koutarou put his cellphone by his ear and ordered his bracelet to answer the call at the same time. By doing this, he could use his bracelet without his surroundings suspecting anything.

“What’s up, Clan.”

Since Koutarou had gotten the bracelet from Clan, she was the only one who could contact him with it. Everyone else would just normally call him on his cellphone. That’s why Koutarou didn’t even need to check who was calling him.

“Are you safe, Bertorion?!”

As Koutarou expected, the voice belonged to Clan. But the voice coming from the bracelet was strung up and louder than normal. That surprised Koutarou and he almost dropped his cellphone.

“W-What now, all of a sudden?!”

“Just answer! Are you safe?!”

“Y-Yeah… I’m safe. There is nothing but peace here.”

Koutarou looked at his surroundings before answering Clan. The amusement park was a peaceful place. If there was any kind of noteworthy incident, it would be his classmates who were still quarreling.

“Which means that the problem is somewhere else?!”

“What do you mean? What’s happened?”

“I just received an emergency rescue signal from Pardomshiha using gravitational waves! I just assumed she was with you which is why I called!”

“So that’s why!”

Sensing what might have happened, Koutarou turned his back to his classmates and whispered instructions to Clan.

“…Clan, please confirm everyone’s whereabouts and the situation at once. Ruth-san wouldn’t send you a rescue signal unless something serious had happened.”

Ruth believed in Clan and had forgiven her, but Theia and Clan hadn’t reconciled yet. Because of that, Ruth wouldn’t frequently contact Clan. And if Ruth was now asking for help from Clan, something serious must have happened.

“I think so too, I’ve already sent an unmanned fighter. I will let you know what’s going on once I find out.”

“…Thank you, Clan.”

“There’s no need for thanks. Master and servant help each other out, right?”

“…Maybe so.”

Koutarou nodded at Clan’s words and realized a change in how he felt.

I’m thinking that it might not be so bad to be Clan’s vassal…

Master and servant helped each other out. Being told that, Koutarou didn’t feel anything out of place. He no longer felt any resistance to what Clan was saying. Clan was starting to properly display her nature as a princess.

“W-Well, enough of that! Bertorion, please move to this position. I will send your armor there!”

As Clan gave Koutarou instructions, a hologram of the amusement park’s map appeared in front of him. There was a red marker blinking in an alley by a warehouse a few blocks away from the amusement park.

Right now, Clan had the authority to use the Blue Knight’s systems. Using that, she would send Koutarou his armor. And the closest place that didn’t attract any attention was that alley.

“…Got it, I’ll go right away.”

Koutarou drilled the location of the marker into his head before ending the communication. He then took swift action.

He imagined that it was an emergency, so sadly, this was the end of his fun weekend.

Part 3

Koutarou explained to his friends that an urgent situation had come up and that he had to go. After making humble apologies, he dashed out of the amusement park and headed towards the alley Clan had marked out. Since it was in the opposite direction of the station where he had come from, it looked like he was taking a roundabout way at first glance, but this was actually the fastest way back to Kitsushouharukaze city.

Returning using the train would take several tens of minutes, including the time it would take to get to the station. But since this might be an emergency, he couldn't take his time. That's why Koutarou was going to go pick up the Blue Knight's armor and fly back. Using the full power of his armor, he should be able to reach the city in a few minutes.

"Bertorion, there are two places in Harukaze city where I can't observe any electromagnetic radiation!"

"Where?!"

"Your residence and a redevelopment zone in the suburbs!"

"Examine those areas some more!"

While running through the unpopulated warehouse area, Koutarou continued his call with Clan. Clan was sending him information the moment she got it. Thanks to that, Koutarou was able to get an understanding of what situation the invader girls was in.

Only Yurika and I went out today. So is Yurika in the redevelopment zone? It's close to the hospital too… The other five are probably in Corona House… Did someone attack Corona House, waiting for me and Yurika to clear out? Do they know about us? But why go after Yurika? She's just a cosplayer. No, could it be that they know that Yurika can use magic now?

As information started coming in, Koutarou began to think of a lot of questions, his anxiety growing for each one formed. Koutarou felt that he needed to hurry, knowing that the invader girls were in a dangerous situation, even though he knew that they wouldn't go down easily. They had become very important to him.

"I will send the armor to you now! Once it's been transferred, forcibly activate it! Omit the startup system check! Activate using individual setting, Reios Fatra Bertorion, version 38 revised!"

As Koutarou ran into the alley by the warehouse he saw a two meter tall space-time hole. From it, a blue armor standing upright slowly appeared. As the armor was appearing, it blew away a ton of dust that had gathered in the alley. The armor's blue color seemed to be glowing as it waited in the dark alley.

Having been successfully transferred, the armor sensed Koutarou's approach and opened up its front. In contrast to its classical look, it was filled to the brim with technology. It was a masterpiece of advanced science that had saved Koutarou's life many times in the past.

"Alright!"

Seeing the armor waiting for him, Koutarou started running faster. He was rushing as he thought that he would now be able to head to the girls.

There was just a few meters left to the armor now.

And that was when something abnormal happened.

"…Activate Engage. Activate Safeguard, using the exception article to preserve life. Make Satomi-kun unable to run."

"W-What?!"

Contract and Descent

The familiar voice of a girl echoed through the alley. And at the same time, Koutarou's lower body stopped moving. As a result, Koutarou stopped just in front of the armor.

"I can't move my legs?! What is going on?!"

Koutarou did his best to try and move his legs. However, they didn't budge at all. It was as if they had taken root into the ground. It was different from being forcibly stopped by someone else. It felt like the orders Koutarou sent to his lower body weren't being conveyed.

"…I activated the contract between us, Satomi-kun. If it's to protect you, the contract will unrestrictedly restrain you."

A lone girl appeared in front of Koutarou. It was one his classmates, wearing an indigo outfit. It was Aika Maki, whom he had been playing with at the amusement park just a while ago.

"Aika-san?! Are you the one doing this?!"

Koutarou didn't know what was going on. He didn't know why his legs wouldn't move or why Maki was in front of him. Based on her tone, he could guess that she was responsible, but he couldn't imagine a normal classmate to be able to do something like this. Confused, Koutarou pressed Maki for an answer.

"No. You're the one who did it."

"What?!"

But Maki's answer only made Koutarou even more confused.

"To be precise, your sword did."

"My sword— Signaltin?!"

When Maki said that, he started focusing on himself. He looked for the source of what was restraining him.

This is certainly Signaltin's magical power… Her majesty's power is at work!

Doing that, Koutarou could feel Signaltin's magic power. It was the white magical power that had Alaia's presence. Even Koutarou, who had no talent for magic could tell.

"But why?! Why is Signaltin restraining me?!"

Koutarou couldn't believe the situation he was in. The power that Alaia had given to him was depriving him of his freedom. He had always believed that Alaia would always be on his side no matter what, so this was a very shocking event.

"…It's because you tried to save me…"

Maki quietly spoke to Koutarou. Her eyes were even more settled down than her voice, and felt very calming.

"That's why the sword fulfilled your wish, and created a magical bond between you and me."

"A magical bond…?"

"Yes… don't you remember? Back in the snowy mountain, when you were trying to heal my wounds, you should have seen something in that white light."

"In the snowy mountain… Ah…"

Koutarou could clearly remember it, even now. Inside of a lodge covered with snow, he desperately tried to save Maki using Signaltin's powers. And in the white light, he had seen the appearance of a young girl hurt all over, trembling from solitude and from the cold.

"I saw it… a hurt and trembling girl…"

Contract and Descent

“I see… at that time, I saw a boy. A boy embracing a half-knit sweater and crying…”

Maki clearly remembered as well. In the light, she had seen a young boy covered in someone else’s blood embracing a sweater and sitting down with a look of blank surprise.

“…Back then I had given up on everything. I had lost the will to live. I probably wouldn’t have been saved if just my wounds were healed. That’s why the sword tried to give me hope. The hope that I wasn’t alone.”

“So that girl… was you…”

That girl, the dying Maki, didn’t just need her wounds healed, but also a will to live. And the source of that will was a bond with someone else. That’s why Signaltin had showed Maki’s true appearance to Koutarou. It was to tell Koutarou what was needed to save Maki.

“And you… saw me…”

“You needed it too, right? Hope that you weren’t alone…”

“I, think so… Somewhere deep inside me, I was rejecting others…”

Having lost his mother, Koutarou stopped trying to develop any deep connections with others. That’s why he needed a bond as well. A powerful bond that would never be torn apart. That’s why he showed Maki his true self. It was to tell Maki what was needed to save Koutarou.

“Just wait, I’ll save you right now!”

“It’s okay, I’ll always be with you…”

The two of them had wanted to embrace each other. To warm their chilled minds and bodies. To hold their small hand and tell them that they are not alone.

They wanted to protect that weak existence in front of them.

“That’s why your sword created a magic bond between us. In order to save both you and I.”

The two’s common desire called forth a new spell from Signaltin.

A contract to connect their hearts, a contract, a bond that would never be cut.

At that time, the two of them needed that no matter what.

“A magical bond… But… can that really be…”

“You should have felt it before. Haven’t you ever known what I was going to do? Haven’t I ever known what you were going to do? When I take an unnatural action, why do you not doubt it?”

“That’s…”

Koutarou had indeed felt it before.

He had felt like Maki had read his mind in the past, both during everyday life and in battle. And he had also known what Maki had wanted him to do.

And… why don’t I doubt Aika-san…? What was Aika-san doing on that snowy mountain? Why was she able to freely use the magical cane? Even now… why am I believing her wild story?

Koutarou could come up with a lot of questions, but he didn’t doubt Maki. Somewhere deep in his heart, he trusted her. That’s why he accepted what she was saying.

“A magical bond… a contract… Using that, you’re sealing off my legs, right?”

“That’s right. That’s why you would never be able to break free. Please stay with me here for a while.”

Signaltin was the source of the contract's power. And if it was Signaltin's doing, then calling for it wouldn't resolve the situation. In other words, Koutarou had no means to break free from this situation.

"Bertorion! I've got footage! Theiamillis-san and the others are currently fighting against someone!"

That was when two holograms appeared alongside Clan's cornered voice. One of the holograms showed Theia's group and the other showed Yurika's group. Both groups could be seen fighting against someone.

"Everyone?! It really is the enemy— Wait, that's the woman from ten years ago?!"

Koutarou started to panic as he saw the girls fighting. Both groups were at a disadvantage, and it looked like they would be defeated. What made Koutarou worry the most was when he spotted the woman, Maya, whom he had fought against eleven years ago. He was well aware of how strong and dangerous she was. If he didn't rush over there right now, Yurika and the others would be in danger.

"Aika-san, please let me go right now! I have to go to help everyone!"

The girls of room 106 were in danger. Koutarou desperately pleaded with Maki, but she simply shook her head.

"I can't. Not letting you do that is my job."

"What?! What does that mean?!"

"It means just what I said. Because, I…"

Maki paused for a moment and showed an adamant expression before continuing.

"I am your enemy! I am a member of Darkness Rainbow, the group targeting room 106!"

"You're lying! I don't believe you! There's no way you would be my enemy!"

Koutarou instantly denied what Maki had said.

To him, Maki was a classmate he got along well with. She couldn't be an enemy, and he didn't want to believe it.

"I don't want to believe it either! I don't want to fight against you! That's why I can't let you go! Because if I do, I would have to fight you!"

"There's no need to fight even if you let me go, right?! We could just stop! You're not the kind of girl that would fight!"

There was no need for the girl trembling alone to fight. What was needed wasn't to fight and win, but to gently stay by someone's side.

"I can't! We would definitely become enemies! Letting you go would mean to annul the contract! If I do, you won't think of me as important! And I won't think of you as important! We'll only be able to see each other as enemies!"

The existence of the contract was driving Maki into a corner.

Clan who could break free from the magical girls' barrier had been able to inform Koutarou about the battle sooner than expected. Because of that, Maki had to forcibly stop Koutarou. But Maki's magic couldn't break through Signaltin's powers that were protecting Koutarou. That's why the only method she could stop him was by activating the contract.

After activating the contract, it wouldn't return to ordinary for a while. In order to free Koutarou in this situation, the contract would have be annulled with both parties' consent.

But Maki wouldn't choose to annul the contract. Doing that would mean that the magical bond would disappear, along with Maki's feelings for Koutarou, and Koutarou's feelings for Maki. In other words, they would return to when they were enemies.

"I don't want that! I love you, Satomi-kun! I want to have these feelings forever! I don't want to return to the me that tried to kill you!"

Maki was crying.

She didn't want to lose who she was now. Being saved by Koutarou, she had learned the joys of living for the first time in her life. Even if that was an illusion created by magic, having spent all of her live alone, it was an illusion she was ready to cling onto. She couldn't stand that if she returned to normal, she might try to kill Koutarou.

"And if everyone dies during this, I will forever hate you!"

"I'm even okay with that! Because, because, I will be able to keep you from fighting! I can keep loving you!"

To Maki, annulling the contract would be the same as her dying.

Annulling the contract would mean that she would return to her lone self living in the darkness. It would mean she would be letting go of the light she had slowly been gathering ever since Koutarou had saved her.

That's why even if Koutarou hated her, even if she was just living inside of an illusion, she couldn't annul the contract.

"If everyone dies, I will hate you! And after that, how would I even continue living?! I just finally learned the meaning of living with others!"

At this rate, Koutarou would lose everything.

Having lost a loved family member, Koutarou had started rejecting others, and at this rate, the girls that had taught him that he can't stay like that were going to lose their lives. Koutarou would surely start hating Maki who wouldn't let him go save them, and that hate would drive them apart. In effect Koutarou would lose all those close to him.

He would lose the bright future he had finally found.

"I don't care if you hate me! You can curse me if you want! But even then, I will stay by your side! I will forever protect you so you will never be alone!"

Maki was prepared to endure Koutarou's abhorrence and stay by his side. Maki would rather be in the flames of hatred than return to the dark coldness of solitude.

"So please, Satomi-kun! Let me stay as your Maki!"

In the past, Koutarou might not have been able to say anything to Maki who had been trembling in the coldness of solitude, searching for love but never finding it, and now that she was cornered, she would try to warm herself by the flames of his hatred. Koutarou knew just how scary it was to lose that warmth. That's why he had been rejecting others.

"Is that what you want?! Do you really want that kind of future?!"

But the Koutarou of now was different. He couldn't stay quiet. He knew that she couldn't stay like that.

"What else can I do?! We were enemies before we even met! But I love you! I don't want to lose this warmth!"

"Believe!"

These had been words he had spoken for Maki's sake. But as he was shouting them, he realized the path he needed to travel.

That's right… I have to believe… I have to believe in the same things Aika-san has to…

Koutarou had to believe, in order to save Maki, to save himself, and to save the kind people that he wanted to rescue. That was—

"Our future is not as dark as we believe!"

—that their future would surely be bright.

That obvious and natural thing was what Koutarou and Maki had to believe in.

"There's no way that our relationship is all just a product of magic! We are the ones that make our own future!"

"Do you really believe that?! Won't you be all alone, crying, in that future?! And won't I be frozen in a dungeon?!"

Truth be told, Maki wanted to believe as well. But she didn't want to lose something she believed in. She had been betrayed so many times in her life already. That's why when she was dying in the snowy mountain, she had given up.

"Of course! If you believe, you will never be alone again! Believe! Don't try to isolate yourself!"

To Koutarou, Maki was like another version of himself. That's why he knew what she needed. It was what he had been taught by the invader girls. If she didn't reject others herself, she would surely feel warmth by her side. He wanted to teach her that, and continued to pour warmth into her. He wanted to affirm her future.

"Even if the spell disappears, it's not like our everyday up until today will too! Our relationship isn't something made just out of magic!"

"Satomi-kun…"

True, magic might have been the start. But after that, Koutarou and Maki had spent so much time together. Koutarou couldn't believe that all of that would just vanish. And there was a reason why he was thinking like that.

"Don't you think so?! Remember! What do you think of the people you went out to play with today?! Do you not feel anything at all?! Or are they your enemies?! That's not right, is it?!"

"Ah…"

Those words left Maki astonished.

There shouldn't be a change in how Maki felt towards her classmates before and after being saved by Koutarou. The contract only existed between her and him. That's why she shouldn't think of her classmates as nothing but clueless people who had no idea of the truth.

"…I-I… think… of everyone… as… as my… friends…"

Intensely shaken up, Maki spoke out how she felt.

She thought of her classmates as friends. In the months since Maki had come to Harukaze high school, her feelings had changed without her even realizing it.

"Even if the magic disappears, we won't become enemies again! As if something like that would ever happen! And if it's like you said, you have friends now! You won't be alone!"

Koutarou was convinced.

Contract and Descent

Even if they had been hostile in the past, there should have been a change in Maki's feelings for Koutarou and they shouldn't be enemies anymore. But even if they weren't enemies, they might start feeling more distant towards one another. But Maki now had friends. Even if she was to become estranged with Koutarou, she wouldn't be alone.

That's right… I'm hopeful… I am hoping everyone in class has a bright future…

The words Koutarou spoke to Maki were also words to himself. What Maki needed to believe in was the same he needed to believe in. By trying to save Maki, he could see that he was changing himself little by little.

"Even if our relationship gets a little worse, we can just rebuild it! You're not alone. We have all the time we need to do that!"

"Do you really, really think so? Am I not alone?!"

Maki unconsciously approached Koutarou, one step at a time.

She already knew that she wasn't alone, that even if she annulled the contract she wouldn't return to her cold self. But she was still anxious about one thing, and she wanted courage to be able to proceed.

"Believe! Open your eyes and look around! Don't give up and close your heart!"

"Will you stay as my friend too, Satomi-kun?! Even if I change, would you be able to endure for a while?!"

Maki felt anxious that if she annulled the contract her feelings towards Koutarou would start to sway. That's why she wanted the courage to be able to believe that wouldn't happen.

"I will probably do something terrible! I might say cruel things and hurt you! But would you still be my friend?!"

And she believed that Koutarou would give her that courage.

While loudly appealing, she stood right in front of Koutarou, peering into his eyes.

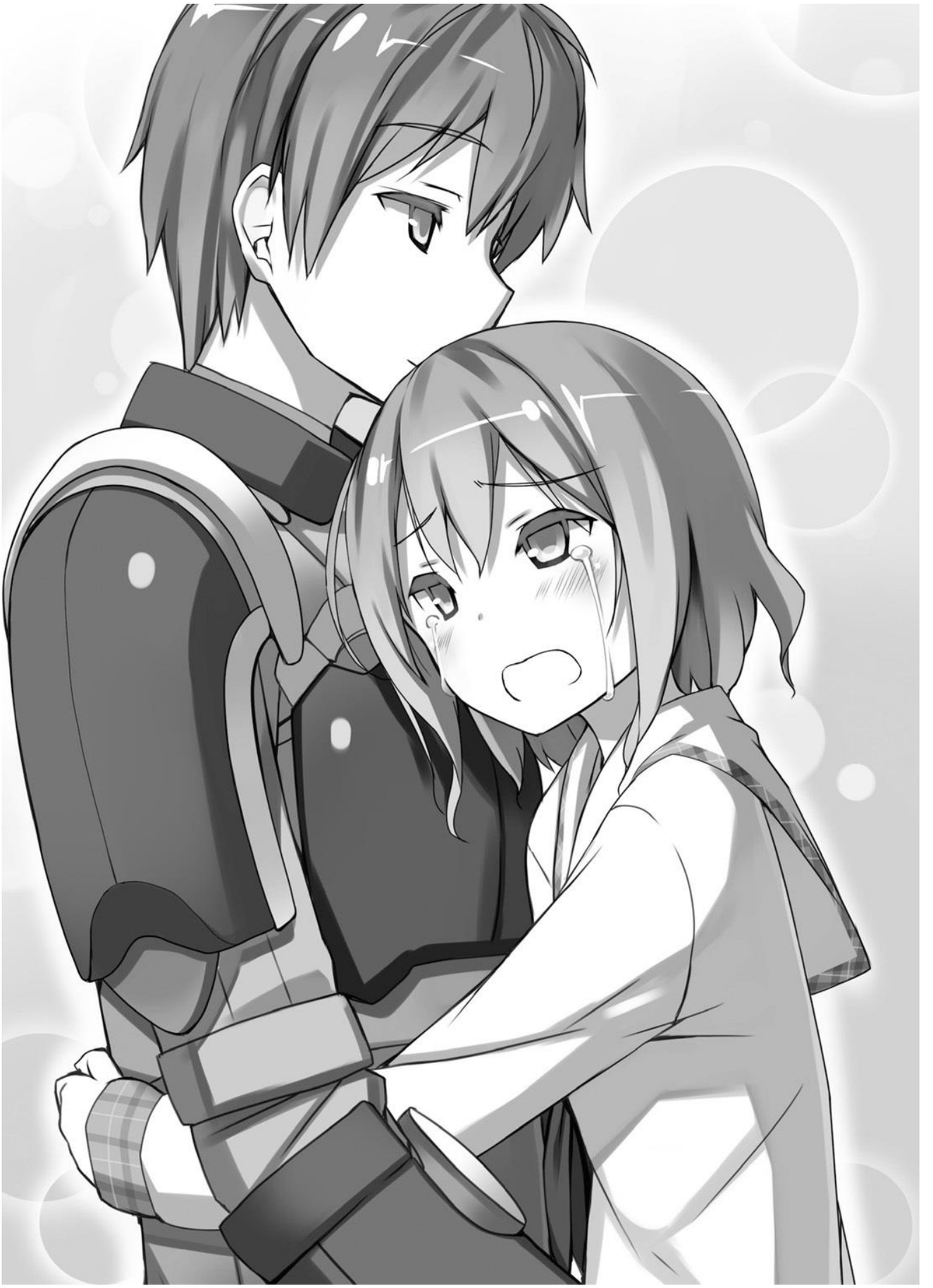
"Don't worry! You're our classmate, Aika Maki!"

"…"

Maki saw Koutarou's strong will in his eyes. Catching that somewhere deep inside her, Maki turned her face down. From her face, several drops of water spilled onto the ground, forming a spotted pattern. Maki then stepped forward step by step until her forehead was pressed against Koutarou's chest.

"…Satomi-kun… please… even if it's just for now… could you please hold me…"

"Aika-san…"



Contract and Descent

Koutarou still couldn't move his lower body, but his arms moved. That's why he adhered to her request and embraced the girl crying right in front of him.

I have to protect her… I did swear to after all…

With a strong urge to protect her, Koutarou held Maki's body. As he did, Maki clung onto his body as if trying to get as close to him as possible.

"…Satomi-kun, I… I…"

"It's okay, Aika-san. There's no way that anxiety and sadness is a product of magic. Those tears of yours are without a doubt your own."

"…Satomi-kun…"

With her tears still flowing, Maki strongly embraced Koutarou. And Koutarou embraced her right back.

It definitely will be okay… these no way that all of these feelings are just created by magic… As if magic could create so much sadness… It's just as Satomi-kun said…

While feeling Koutarou's warmth, Maki finally made up her mind.

"…Satomi-kun… I understand… I will… believe… in these feelings that I've felt up until today…"

Maki believed in the feelings that she had for Koutarou, that her feelings wouldn't all vanish just because she annulled the contract.

"In return… can I ask you for one thing…?"

"Yeah."

"…I want to stay like this until the contract is annulled…"

"I understand… I'll stay like this…"

"…Thank you. Satomi-kun…"

While shedding tears, Maki pressed her body against Koutarou. But there was no fear or sadness on her face. She believed in her own feelings. She had believed to take a step forward towards her own future.

That's why she was able to declare without any hesitation.

"…Disengage, Koutarou and Maki…"

They were words that reported the end of a bond, but at the same time they were words that formed a new eternal bond.

Part 4

As Maki annulled the contract, a pure-white light enveloped them as it had before. The two were then torn apart from each other, leaving them alone in the light.

But in the next moment, a young girl appeared in front of Koutarou, and a young boy appeared in front of Maki. The boy and girl rapidly grew into the current Koutarou and Maki. And then the two found themselves facing each other in the pure-white light.

“…Why…?”

Maki pressed her hands against her chest as she looked at Koutarou with a surprised expression.

“What do you mean?”

Koutarou smiled at Maki. In contrast to her, he was calm. That might have been because he could feel Alaia’s presence from the white light surrounding them.

“This is strange, Satomi-kun… I annulled the contract, but nothing is changing…”

“There’s no change?”

“Yes…”

Maki tilted her head and continued speaking.

“…I still love you as much as I did a moment ago… and I don’t have even an inkling of an urge to kill you… I thought my feelings would change because of the annulment…”

The contract was already annulled, and Koutarou had regained his freedom as proof of that. That’s why there should have been a change within Maki. But that hadn’t happened, and that confused Maki.

Maki hadn’t expected all of her love for Koutarou to vanish once she annulled the contract, but she still expected some kind of change.

But now with the contract gone, it turned out that that worry was for nothing. Maki’s feelings remained the same.

“Fu, fufufufu, ahahaha!”

That was when Koutarou suddenly started laughing. He had an idea why that was the case.

“I see, so that’s it! It’s obvious once you think about it! Ahahahaha!”

Koutarou realized that Maki was thinking too hard about and couldn’t stop laughing.

“Satomi-kun?”

Seeing Koutarou laughing like that, Maki looked at him with suspicion. Koutarou desperately tried to hold the laughter in while giving her an explanation.

“…Kukuku, I was just thinking that I had forgotten who had given me this power.”

Koutarou looked at the light enveloping them.

“That person is wise, virtuous and overflowing with benevolence… and there’s no way that this sword that holds her feelings and oath would selfishly rewrite your feelings, Aika-san. I think it returned you to normal after it was no longer needed.”

Alaia’s feelings and oath were embodied in Signaltin. So the sword brainwashing Maki would be the same as Alaia brainwashing her, and Koutarou couldn’t imagine her doing something as twisted as that. In that case, its effects should have gradually waned after Maki was able to live

on her own. In other words, the sword was only borrowing its effect from the bond that would eventually form between Maki and Koutarou naturally.

“Then… there was never any fear of brainwashing?”

“Yeah. I can’t think of any reason for why there hasn’t been any change in you.”

“No, that’s not true.”

Having understood the truth, Maki showed a delighted smile.

Her feelings had been her own. She loved Koutarou out of her own volition.

“My feelings of love towards you are hundreds of times larger than my feelings of hostility towards you, so I just might not be feeling the change.”

She didn’t know what was the truth, and because of that, she believed that her feelings were stronger. That was the more romantic option.

“H-Hey…”

Koutarou instinctively blushed at Maki’s sudden declaration of love. Even though the contract was supposed to have been annulled, her feelings were seemingly transmitted directly to Koutarou. The annulment of the contract had almost no effect on their compatibility.

“Fufufu, sorry.”

Maki was showing a refreshing smile since she had been freed from a lot of suffering. Her smile was as innocent as a child, but at the same time it was filled with affection.

“To be honest, I wanted to tease you a little more, but… please go. There are no more people you need to save here.”

Maki felt like she shouldn’t keep Koutarou here anymore. He had something he had to do. So she was going to see him off here.

“You idiot.”

A dull sound rang out.

“Ow?! What are you doing?! I was being serious!”

Maki puffed up her cheeks and put her hands on her reddened forehead. Koutarou’s fist had struck her at about 70% strength of what he used on Yurika. So it might have been a bit too much for a normal girl.

“You just don’t get it, Aika-san.”

“Eh…?”

But Koutarou wasn’t apologizing, instead he scolded her.

“Don’t give me that ‘Eh?!’ Here!”

Koutarou presented his right hand to Maki.

“Satomi-kun…?”

Maki didn’t understand what Koutarou was doing, so she simply alternated looking at Koutarou’s hand and his face.

“I told you, didn’t I?! Don’t try to isolate yourself!”

That was when Maki understood that Koutarou had no intention of leaving her alone.

“Aika-san, you don’t have to fight anymore! But come with me and pray that I will win from nearby!”

As the words reached Maki's ears, Koutarou grasped onto Maki's left hand.

"Ah…"

In that moment, Maki's heart started throbbing at an explosive pace. That heartbeat sent boiling blood throughout all of Maki's body.

I was… born for this person… To love him, and to be loved… Definitely, I'm sure of it…

Maki's feelings elevated and she showed no signs of calming down. She felt like she had to do something, but she didn't know what. She couldn't think of anything because she was in a daze and couldn't gather her thoughts. No matter how many deep breaths she took, she couldn't get rid of that stifling feeling.

Normally one would feel unhappy when in such a bad condition. But Maki felt an overwhelming happiness.

"…I understand, Satomi-kun."

Maki nodded.

"I will pray. But it won't be for your victory. I will pray that your future will be bright, forever and ever…"

Maki held Koutarou's hand. That was her everything for now.

Part 5

Wrapped in the flames produced by Maya, Harumi fell to the ground unable to so much as even scream. Without any protection against the high temperatures, Harumi's body was being severely burned in several places. They were injuries so severe that even people without any kind of medical knowledge could tell they were fatal.

"Sakuraba-senpai, Sakuraba-senpai!"

Of course, even Yurika knew that as she ran towards Harumi. The moment she had seen Harumi, she knew that her life was in danger.

With these burns, not even my strongest healing spell would be good enough! Sakuraba-senpai will die!

Yurika had knowledge of healing spells, and their effect far exceeded modern medical science. But Harumi's injuries were so grave that not even that would be enough. It was a miracle that she was even still breathing.

How can I save her?!

Yurika desperately racked her brain. She went through all of the spells she had learned and examined her possibilities of saving Harumi, but she couldn't think of a spell that could save her. With Harumi dying in front of her, Yurika was panicking.

It won't work using ordinary means! I need to think of a combination of spells that would keep her alive… No, maybe I could anchor her soul and turn her into a ghost like with Sanae-chan?!

Next she considered using a combination of spells. But even then she couldn't think of a way to keep Harumi alive. Cornered, Yurika began considering anchoring Harumi's soul to the land of living while she would heal her body.

Wait, Sanae-chan?! That's right, if I do what Sanae-chan does then it might be possible!

However that was when Yurika had an epiphany. It was an idea that had arisen when she started thinking about Sanae. She was confident that her idea would work. With a determined expression she firmly grasped her cane.

If I merge with Sakuraba-senpai like Sanae does, then there's a chance I can heal her!

Yurika was going to use a merging spell.

When merging with living creatures, both minds merged into one while their body entered a state in between the two bodies. In other words, if the gravely injured Harumi and uninjured Yurika merged, then once merged, their body would have half the burns. And in that state, Yurika's healing magic might have an effect. Then, after treating her, she simply needed to separate again.

However, this was an incredibly dangerous bet. There was no guarantee that healing magic would have an effect even after they merged, not to mention it wasn't certain that they could use magic once Yurika and Harumi merged. On top of that, if healing magic failed after they merged, Yurika might die as well. But Yurika put her hopes on this faint possibility. She wanted to save Harumi, regardless of the risk.

"Temporary Fusion! Modifier — Stabilize, Effective Time Half!"

Yurika held her cane overhead and chanted her spell. She had put in two additional modifications to its normal spell. Since she just needed enough time to cast her healing spell, she shortened the effective time and used that magic power for greater stability instead. All she could do now was pray that she would be conscious after the merge and that she would be able to cast her healing spell.

Contract and Descent

Please, go well! Please, let me save Sakuraba-senpai!

The orange light that had gathered at the tip of her cane enveloped her and Harumi's bodies. Yurika's and Harumi's outlines gradually began to fade and melted into the orange light. The orange light started glowing brighter and eventually turned into two large masses of light.

While Yurika was trying to save Harumi, Kanae and Maya continued fighting.

"…How foolish. Just what could come out of that?"

But when she sensed Yurika's spell activating, she stopped moving for a moment and showed an amazed expression as she looked at the two girls wrapped in light. Not missing that large opening, Kanae swung her cane down to attack Maya.

"I won't let you interfere!"

"I wouldn't interfere. If I just let her be, Rainbow will use up her magical power. And once she's unable to use magic, she is useless."

The cane sensed Kanae's urge to rush and cast a spell that sped her up. Moreover, there was a large opening now that Maya was distracted by Yurika and Harumi. But even then Maya was one step ahead. She began moving once more and easily dodged Kanae's cane while attacking with the blade on the right hand.

"And you won't beat me on your own… I win, Kanae."

"Kuh!"

Kanae was barely able to block the attack. That's why she had been unable to dodge Maya's follow up kick and took it straight on. The attack sent her flying and she slammed into the ground. Their difference in power was obvious. It was just like Maya said, Kanae couldn't beat Maya on her own.

"It looks like your disciple will take the same path you did, Nana…"

Leaving Kanae alone as she was no longer able to move, Maya stared at Yurika and Harumi. She could see the two masses of lights around Yurika and Harumi merging into one large mass of light. Yurika and Harumi's merging was almost complete, but Maya had no intention of intervening. Because she knew that she would have the advantage if she didn't.

Maya figured that even if Yurika managed to heal Harumi, she would have severely depleted her magical power from the healing spell and merging spell. Merging was already a highly advanced spell, and one of the strongest possible healing spells would be needed as well. Maya couldn't imagine that Yurika would have much magical power left considering she had used several spells in their fight just before this. She would probably reach her limit after casting a few more spells. That's why letting Yurika do as she pleased should allow things to develop more favorably for Maya.

"I guess that just means she was a good disciple…"

In the past, Nana had thrown away her life as a magician in order to save the powerless Yurika. And now, Yurika was about to throw herself into a situation where she would be unable to win in order to save Harumi. In the end, Nana and Yurika were very similar, as they walked down the same path. That was what Maya was thinking as the orange light started taking the form a person.

However, the future developed in a direction that Maya hadn't foreseen.

"…?! What?!"

Suddenly, other colors began mixing in with the orange light. They were blue and white. The new colors enveloped the orange light and changed into a three-colored stripe. The orange light began dying down and instead the blue and white light grew stronger.

“It wasn’t just a normal merging?! Is it a transformation?! Or is it a summon?! No, that doesn’t matter! I won’t let you, Rainbow Yurika!”

Maya thrust her arms forward and began incanting a spell.

“Multiple Energy Bolt! Target Option — Sidewinder!”

With most of her body now mechanical, Maya had lost a majority of her magical power. But it wasn’t like she was completely unable to use spells. The usage was limited, but she was able to use spells in the moments she had to. Now was one of those moments.

It doesn’t matter what that is, I won’t let it go the way Yurika wants!

Maya’s intuition as a warrior told her that what was about to appear in front of her was very dangerous. That’s why she didn’t hesitate to use magic.

She focused on the miniature cane built into her right arm and several red lights started to surround her arm. At the same time, Maya started aiming with the gun in her left arm. She was going to attack with both her gun and her spell.

“Take this!”

Maya’s attack was slightly faster than Yurika and Harumi’s merging. The magical arrows created by magic, and the bullets fired from her left arm assaulted the two. Both attacks were deadly, and should be fatal to Yurika and Harumi who were defenseless.

“The attacks disappeared?! How?!”

The arrows and bullets disappeared just before reaching Yurika and Harumi. It was like the attacks had just been an illusion. They hadn’t been blocked or repelled; they had simply, in the literal meaning of the word, disappeared.

“That’s not possible! Just the aftereffect of them emerging erased my attacks! Just what is going to appear?!”

“Yurika-chan… Sakuraba-san…”

Both Maya and Kanae, who had finally managed to get up, were unable to take their eyes of the spectacle taking place in front of them. The two continued to stand and blankly stare at the blue and white light.

The blue and white light grew stronger as the ground and air started trembling alongside a roaring sound. And with that, the light that had just swelled up shrank in an instant, and a lone girl appeared. It was a girl unfamiliar to both Maya and Kanae.

“That’s… Yurika-chan and Sakuraba-san’s merged form…?”

“No! That’s not something easy as that!”

The girl was supposed to share Yurika’s and Harumi’s traits. But her face had no traces of either of them. She had long and beautiful white hair, and sometimes a hint of blue could be found in it. Moreover, the clothes she was wearing were neither Yurika’s nor Harumi’s, but a distinct looking shrine maiden’s outfit based on blue and white.

But what stood out the most were the two globes floating around her. They were about the size of a volleyball and made from a translucent material like glass. The globes glowed in a distinct color each, blue and white.

She didn't look like the merged form of Yurika and Harumi at all. Moreover, her body had no signs of any burns. It was as if Yurika and Harumi had been replaced by someone else.

"…That is without a doubt a being of higher existence… Just what did you do, Nijino Yurika?!"

Maya seemed mortified as she ground her teeth. She could tell from experience that she stood no chance against the girl in front of her. That was how much power the girl was radiating.

"…What was I… I think I tried to save myself and me and me merged…?"

But the girl that had appeared was puzzled as well. Her memories were clouded and she couldn't even tell who she was herself. She didn't know the people around her, where she was or what was even happening.

"Take this, you monster!"

Seeing the girl standing still in a blank surprise, Maya saw her chance and attacked. She attacked the same way she had before.

If this doesn't beat her, I don't stand a chance!

Maya figured that this was her first and last chance of winning.

"Kyaa?!"

However, the moment the girl sensed danger and let out a scream, Maya's attacks disappeared just like they had before. The girl hadn't done anything but let out a scream.

"Impossible! That wasn't magic or spiritual energy, and she didn't use any kind of tool either! She simply erased my attack without any motion! To think such power existed in the world! The difference in power is like light and day!"

Maya was astonished. This was no longer even a fight. Maya gave up and accepted her defeat. Like an elephant crushing an ant, she would probably be defeated without her opponent even realizing she was an enemy.

"…What is happening…? I don't know… anything…"

But the girl didn't attack Maya. The attack only confused the girl even more, and not understanding anything made her even more scared. But in the next moment, she suddenly looked up.

"…But I can tell… that person is approaching…"

The girl was supposedly looking at a wall, but she seemed to be looking at something far, far away, as if the wall wasn't even there. There, she saw something, which brightened her expression as she mumbled.

"…Everything will be fine… That person will save me…"

That was when the two globes around the girl suddenly disappeared without a sound. At the same time, her outline faded, and she was surrounded by an orange light once more. Eventually, the mass of light split into two and the two masses gradually took the shape of a person each. One was Harumi and the other was Yurika. Having merged into one, the two girls now returned to their original forms.

"Hah, hahaha, what, was that all?! What a bluff!"

Having accepted her own defeat after the appearance of an unknown enemy, Maya instinctively found herself laughing as the enemy suddenly disappeared.

Sustaining something like that would take a vast amount of energy. It's only obvious that they would be unable to sustain it for long! There was no need for me to panic!

Maya found her own fear incredibly amusing. Because of the relief she felt from escaping her crisis and her realization of how ridiculous the situation really was, her laughter continued for a while longer.

Yurika, who had regained her form, was surprised by the same thing Maya had been.

W-We just transformed into something! I think it's probably because of surplus of power in the merging… but the transformation was so powerful that I couldn't sustain it for long! That's why we returned to ourselves!

Yurika didn't have a clear understanding of what had happened either. She still couldn't tell what she had transformed into or what she had been thinking at the time. All she knew was that something unexpected had happened.

"Ah?! T-That's right, Sakuraba-senpai!"

That was when Yurika remembered Harumi. Yurika forcibly moved her exhausted body and crawled up to Harumi who was lying next to her.

"…Thank god, her wounds are healed…"

Having crawled up to Harumi, Yurika closely examined her body and found that all of the burns on her body had vanished without a trace. Yurika figured that it was likely to be an aftereffect of their transformation.

"…I don't know what happened, but I was able to save Sakuraba-senpai…"

Relieved that Harumi had been able to recover her beautiful body, tears formed in her eyes. At that time, Harumi opened her eyes.

"…Nijino-san."

Harumi looked at Yurika's face and tried to get up. Yurika hurriedly reached out with her hands and supported Harumi.

"Sakuraba-senpai! Are you okay?!"

"Yes. Thanks to Nijino-san."

Harumi smiled and nodded.

"You can tell?!"

"Yes. Maybe it's because we merged… but I still have some of your memories."

"Now that you mention it, I also have…"

When Yurika focused on her memories, she could sometimes remember memories that completely ignored the flow. Because they were memories of knitting and taking examinations in the hospital, she could tell they belonged to Harumi right away.

And because they had shared memories, Harumi had reached a certain truth.

"Nijino-san, you really were a real magical girl…"

"That's… yes, I'm sorry for not telling you…"

Yurika had been about to deny what Harumi was saying, but she quickly changed her mind.

Harumi now had some memories of Yurika being a magical girl, excuses wouldn't work anymore.

"It's okay, you don't have to worry. I can understand why you wanted to hide it. Because… it's for that person…"

"Sakuraba-senpai…"

Yurika blushed at Harumi's words. Harumi started blushing as well. The two had fallen in love with the same person. And now that they had shared memories, they knew the reason for why the other loved that person.

Pretend wrestling with Satomi-kun… It hurts, but it's a warm and happy feeling… Maybe I should have Satomi-kun try some techniques on me too… If he did it to Nijino-san he might be willing to do it on me too… Submission, huh…

So this is how Sakuraba-senpai and Satomi-san met… He had appeared out of nowhere and saved her while she was surrounded by enemies… It's like from a shoujo manga… Ah, that's her memories from the play. They first met during the club recruitment… But this is like from a shoujo manga too… I'm jealous… As for me, our meeting was…

Yurika saw a different side to the person she loved. Their memories elevated their feelings and their romantic feelings grew greater than ever before.

But that was as long as the two could continue smiling.

"Sorry to interrupt after your successful treatment, but it's about time for you all to die."

Maya approached with weapons in both hands. She was making it her top priority to kill the two. Having seen Yurika and Harumi's merge and transformation, she couldn't guess what else they had in store even if Yurika runs out of magical power. Even if there were no more tricks up their sleeves, they would become problematic if she let them escape now.

"Sakuraba-senpai, get behind me! I will protect you!"

"Nijino-san, no! You don't have enough magical power left to fight against her!"

Yurika was about to step forward and defend Harumi when she was stopped. Since Harumi had Yurika's memories, she knew Yurika didn't have enough power left to fight.

"Run away, both of you!"

But before Maya could attack, Kanae squeezed out what remaining strength she had left and stood in Maya's path.

"Higashihongan-san?!"

"But, Kanae-san!"

"There's no need for all three of us to die! Now go!"

Kanae turned her cane into a bow and fired arrow after arrow towards Maya. However, Maya shot the arrows down with her gun, dodged them or repelled them with her blade. Kanae couldn't hit Maya with her injuries and without Yurika backing her up. Moreover, Maya was completely unharmed.

"At least your spirit is the same as it was back then, Kanae."

"I won't let you kill those two! They're my daughter's friends!"

"Just stay down, Kanae. There's no need for you to die as well."

Maya's attacks could easily hit their mark though. Kanae tried protecting herself with her cane, but was unable to fully block Maya's attacks.

"Guh, Aaahh!"

Kanae received a direct hit from Maya's knee and fell down on the spot. Kanae still tried getting up, but she had reached her limit. Not even she could muster enough strength to stand up again.

"Good bye you two. You did try hard though."

“Sakuraba-senpai!”

“Nijino-san!”

Maya gave the two her parting words and turned the barrel of the gun on her left arm on them and at the same time she started concentrating on her right arm again. Seeing that, Yurika and Harumi strongly embraced one another as if trying to protect the other. They knew they were about die.

“Energy Javelin — Modifier — Area Effect.”

Alongside Maya’s indifferent voice, several bullets and spears of red light assaulted Yurika and Harumi.

“…I’m sorry for getting you involved, Sakuraba-senpai…”

“Don’t worry. You are my best friend…”

Having used up all of their power, the two were helpless. Tightly holding on to one another, they closed their eyes. The two of them could at least take comfort that their last moments hadn’t been alone.

However, neither attack reached Yurika and Harumi. The only thing that reached them was the sound of consecutive impact sounds, similar to a jackhammer used on a street.

“H-Huh…?”

Confused by this, Yurika opened her eyes. In front of her was a wide back wrapped in a blue armor.

“Clan, the bullets weren’t properly blocked. Are you sure you didn’t break the barrier when you were messing with it?”

“Of course not! The distortion field is operating normally! The enemy’s attack is what’s unusual!”

Next, hearing that voice, Harumi opened her eyes wide in shock and found the same thing Yurika did.

“I’d think so. She’s a magician.”

“Even taking that into consideration, the bullet’s power is abnormal! Take care not to use any brute force approaches until I can gather all the data! Not even your armor can take too many hits of that!”

“I’ll take as much care as you care for dinner.”

“Bertorion, you’re being awfully mean today!”

A vivid blue armor. A reliable and wide back. A powerful voice that gives you courage just from hearing it. But at the same time, a very casual atmosphere. That appearance and behavior was something that Harumi could never forget, and driven by a deep relief and overflowing with nostalgia, Harumi instinctively shouted out their names.

“Koutarou-sama! Clan-sama!”

“Satomi-san?!”

Hearing Harumi’s and Yurika’s surprised voices, that person, Koutarou, turned around.

“Are you okay, Sakuraba-senpai? Yurika?”

“Yes! Nijino-san saved me!”

Harumi was in tears, but she had regained her smile.

As long as this person is with me, I will be okay… No, that's not it… I will accept any future that this person brings!

Harumi felt like the last piece of the puzzle fell into place, and that her world was now complete. Her place in the world was here. Feeling like she was being led by destiny, Harumi was wrapped in a deep sense of joy.

"Is that so… Good job, Yurika."

Learning that Yurika had done her best again, Koutarou showed a small smile. Hearing that Yurika had given it her all made Koutarou happy. He felt similar to what a brother would feel towards his normally useless younger sister.

"Y-Yes!"

And that younger sister was the same. Happy, Yurika nodded her head repeatedly with tears in her eyes.

"But, but, Satomi-san, why are you here?!"

Koutarou's appearance came as a surprise to Yurika. She hadn't been able to contact him, and Sanae who could follow the traces of auras wasn't with him either. It should be impossible for the outside world to peek inside of Yurika's barrier.

"…Yurika, apparently the barrier you magicians make cuts off electromagnetic radiation and sound too well."

Because the barrier to ward off people completely isolated the area, it actually made it easier for Clan to detect with her sensors. If the barrier had also released dummy electromagnetic radiation and sounds, Clan would have struggled to find it.

"You magicians… Satomi-san, d-did you…"

Koutarou's answer came as a big surprise, and Yurika's face turned pale. Anxiety, fear and panic filled her chest. Yurika hadn't been surprised by the method to find her barrier, she was surprised by what Koutarou had said first.

He knows… Satomi-san knows the one thing I didn't want him to know…

The words 'you magicians' affirmed that Yurika wasn't just a freeloading cosplayer in a very roundabout way. But that she was indeed a real magical girl.

"Y-You're wrong! I-I'm not a magician! Uhm… I'm just cosplaying with the cane you gave me!"

In the past she might have confirmed that he was right, but now Yurika was desperately denying it. She rapidly shook her head, causing her hair to sway and her tears to scatter.

There was no way Yurika could affirm it since it would be the same as throwing away the days they had spent together. For the first time in her life, she had found a person that needed her. And Yurika needed that person as well. Because of that, she had to conceal the fact that she was a magical girl no matter what. This wasn't just for his sake; Yurika also wanted him to think of her as very normal, and if possible, cute girl.

"I'm a bad girl! I'm just a useless girl! It's not like that! I'm not a real magician!"

She wanted him to scold her when she was sloppy. She wanted him to hit her when she was up to no good. She wanted to be his practice partner for wrestling techniques whenever she had free time. And she wanted him to praise her if she raised her grades a little. She wanted him to pat her on the head if she didn't place last in a race at school. She wanted the two of them to read manga and discuss it together. She wanted to fight over snacks. Yurika simply wanted to live a normal life and get excited and depressed over normal things.

But she was about to lose that. If Koutarou found out that she was a magical girl, he would definitely look at her in a different way. Yurika was desperate to save her everyday life. She was unsightly and giving it her all. Yurika cried out like an infant being pulled apart from its family.

“Calm down, Yurika.”

“You’re wrong, you’re—”

A dull sound rang out.

“Auu?!”

Yurika ignored Koutarou’s attempt calm her down and continued arguing vehemently. But she finally stopped speaking when she felt a familiar pain strike her head.

“Yurika, I only want to know one thing.”

Holding her forehead, Yurika looked up and saw Koutarou staring right at her. He had a powerful gentle and a very trustful expression.

“What are you going to do after you graduate?”

“Ah…”

Koutarou’s words pierced Yurika’s heart and easily swept away all the anxiety, fear and panic that Yurika was feeling. Instead, she was filled with relief, hope and happiness.

This person really is… my… my…!

Tears spilled from Yurika’s eyes, but she responded with a large smile.

“I will go to Kitsushou U! Together with Satomi-san and Sakuraba-senpai!”

There was a mountain of things that Yurika wanted to say, but simply saying that she wanted to go to Kitsushou University was enough to convey all of it. Yurika knew just what Koutarou had meant with his question. That was all they needed for now.

“…Got it. Leave the rest to me. Just do your multiplications or something and wait.”

“Yes… I don’t want to do anymore multiplication, but I’ll try…”

After nodding, Yurika felt her strength leaving her and slumped to the floor. And like Koutarou had said, she started doing multiplication in her head.

Part 6

Turning his back towards Yurika and the others, Koutarou closed in on Maya one step at a time. Meanwhile, Maya put her hands on her hips and calmly waited on him.

“I’ve kept you waiting.”

“That’s not quite true. Well… if this was a date that we have decided on beforehand, I might have given you a slap though.”

Surprise wasn’t the only reason as to why Maya hadn’t attacked Koutarou all this time. Since she knew how powerful Koutarou was, she had to make adjustments to her mechanical body to best oppose him.

In exchange for this power up, the amount of time I can continue fighting will drop considerably… But I guess it can’t be helped if it’s a date with this boy…

There were limiters on Maya’s body to keep it from breaking itself by going too fast or too strong. And Maya had released those in order to fight Koutarou. As a result, Maya wouldn’t be able to fight for as long, but she had gotten even stronger than before.

“Well, I was on a date with your disciple.”

“If you’re here… does that mean that Maki is dead?”

Maya slightly narrowed her eyes. It was a minor change, but her expression turned much sharper. But Koutarou shook his head towards her.

“No. I have her captured. There are a lot of things I want to ask her after all.”

“I see. Then take good care of her. You should get some good use out of her.”

Maya smiled, her sharp expression from before softened up.

“And those are the words from her master?”

“Since she was captured, she’s only a risk now.”

“I’ll just pretend I didn’t hear that. I feel bad for your disciple.”

“How kind as always…”

Maya said nostalgically and showed a small smile.

“But still… I had wondered after hearing Maki’s report, but to think it really was you. What a surprise.”

“It’s been around eleven years, hasn’t it?”

“You shouldn’t keep a girl waiting for her date that long.”

“Are you at the age to be called a girl?”

“I feel bad for Kanae if you put it like that.”

Maya indicated the place where Kanae laid collapsed and laughed. In fact, Maya and Kanae were the same age.

“As for me, just like you can see, both my mind and body are young enough for girl to fit.”

Maya took a pose to show off her good looks. And she did indeed have the charm to pass of as a girl.

“That said, in the short time since we last met, your atmosphere has changed quite a bit. You’ve turned into a strange girl.”

Contract and Descent

Koutarou observed Maya's body with a serious expression.

Maya's body was indeed that of a beautiful girl's, but there were markings and mechanical parts all over her body, and by her shoulders and legs, her body had split apart and machines stuck out. Even Koutarou could tell that her body was mostly artificial.

She has artificial legs and arms… and her torso too? She's practically a robot…

Despite her charming appearance, Koutarou wasn't going to fall for her, though his heart might beat a little faster because of the tension and fear.

"Boy, a good man doesn't stare a girl's body like that. And strange goes both ways."

Maya showed a soft smile, but she was carefully observing Koutarou's body.

He was a special boy to begin with, but… he doesn't seem to have aged a day in eleven years? And that armor is suspicious too. It wasn't in Maki's report… and it seems to be hiding a few tricks up its sleeves… It also nullified the energy javelins… Either its the boy's power or the armor's… And since he's here after dealing with Maki, he might be using magic too…

Maya had witnessed Koutarou break through the wall and ceiling of the abandoned building to protect Yurika and Harumi. That's why she could get a hunch of what kind of power the armor had. And adding that power onto Koutarou's own, Maya imagined she was in for a problematic fight.

"I guess so. I've become quite a strange boy myself."

Koutarou said as he laughed, though his eyes were not.

"So here's a proposal… What if instead of just having this date, we start dating seriously?"

"What?"

"I think we both want to avoid a war of attrition against an opponent with unknown powers, no?"

"…Are you asking me to join you?"

"My, we'd be real lovers. I don't hate children like you, boy. If we team up, we could defeat any enemy."

Maya was serious. Ever since she figured that the boy that Maki was fighting against might be the same person that she had fought eleven years ago, she had wanted to recruit him to her side. However, her reason was different from Maki's. She only wanted Koutarou's power. This was another reason as to why Maya hadn't attacked.

"It's not like we want to kill you. We're just after the vast magical power in that room. And we'll do anything we have to, whether that's fighting or becoming lovers."

"Magical power…"

Koutarou recalled what Yurika had said in the past.

Now that I think about it, she was talking about evil magical girls targeting the magical power in my room… Since she's a real magical girl, I guess it makes sense for her to have been telling the truth…

As a result, Koutarou understood that there was at least some truth to Maya's words.

"If you become my lover, I will spare the others. Even Yurika over there. Of course, you would have to persuade them…"

Maya knew that Koutarou could control the magical power in room 106 to a certain degree. In other words, stealing the magical power from the room and making Koutarou her ally was essentially the same thing. Moreover, if she could make Koutarou her pawn, she could regain a

leading role in Darkness Rainbow. On the other, deciphering and controlling the power wouldn't help Maya. That was why pulling Koutarou over to her side was nothing but positive.

"I see, so that's how it is…"

While he didn't know Maya's private circumstances, he understood that she was seriously trying to make him her ally.

"How about it? It shouldn't be such a bad deal for you. You'll be able to protect your friends after all…"

Maya whispered to Koutarou in a flirtatious and sweet voice. It was an alluring voice that would sway any man's heart.

"I refuse."

However, Koutarou rejected Maya's proposal without any hesitation. Unable to accept that, Maya questioned him.

"Why?! What don't you like about it?!"

"Honestly, it's not a bad deal. And you're beautiful."

"Then why—?!"

"It's simple. It's because there's someone that wants to protect that room from you guys."

"Yurika?! You're saying you prefer her over me?!"

Maya, who was full of pride, erupted. She would have been able to easily ignore any other reason and choose to fight. But Koutarou's reason had been Yurika of all things. Maya was convinced that she was superior to Yurika in all ways possible, in both her strength and her femininity. That's why she couldn't accept it, her pride didn't let her, both as a warrior and as a woman.

"You would probably never understand just how amazing Yurika is."

"There's no way I'd understand! She is a complete failure!"

Maya took a stance while rejecting Koutarou's words. The weapons installed on her body pointed towards Koutarou, one after another.

"That's right. We're all failures. Unlike you…"

Yurika's wish was enough of a reason for Koutarou to fight. What lead him to feel that way was because they were both failures and because of all the time they had spent together.

And so, Koutarou chose to fight.

What he was protecting was something hard to put into words. Power, talent, price or status didn't matter. That was because Koutarou and the invader girls had been able to find peace despite that.

"…Cradle, give me my sword."

"As you wish, my lord."

"Come, Signaltin!"

Therefore, the sword will shine.

To realize the oath and wish put into it.

Bonds

Part 1

Saturday, April 24

Crimson and Green's cooperation was only disordered for 30 seconds or so.

Before that, their teamwork had been perfect and they had been cornering Theia and the others. But during those 30 seconds, their movements got visibly worse.

"What's wrong, Green?! Your forecasts are wrong?!"

"I'm sorry, Crimson! Just a moment ago, some higher level of being descended onto the world and threw my predictions off!"

"Just what world did it come from, damnit, during these busy times! …Could it be that devil Maki contracted?!"

"I think so… But if it's by Maya-san, things might be a little more troublesome…"

Green's voice was clouded. If the higher level of being wasn't summoned by Maki, then chances were that Maya was in danger.

"Wait, you mean that Yurika might have summoned it?!"

With most of her body now replaced with machines, Maya couldn't use any large-scale summoning magic. That's why if Maki hadn't summoned her contracted partner, then Yurika would probably be the one responsible for summoning the higher level being.

"We can't disregard that possibility. That's why we need to hurry and finish up over here!"

"Got it!"

Green and Crimson wanted to wrap things up at room 106 as quickly as possible and move to help Maya or Maki. Their disordered cooperation had already recovered so it shouldn't be that hard.

"After the blond haired girl attacks with her energy bullet, she'll pass over the manhole up ahead."

"Explosion — Modifier — Time Trigger!"

"Force Field — Modifier — Area Effect!"

Following Green's forecast, Crimson placed a timed spell while Green activated a defensive spell.

"Blue Knight! Fire the Particle Cannon at full speed!"

"As you wish, my princess."

And just like Green had foreseen, Theia took action. The cannon she summoned from the Blue Knight opened fire. But since they had prepared a defensive barrier before Theia opened fire, her attacks were all blocked.

"Tsk!"

Realizing her attacks were blocked, Theia charged forward for her next attack. But once she reached the manhole, an explosion suddenly happened around her.

"Your highness?!"

Ruth let out a cry. The explosion was from an offensive spell Crimson had prepared beforehand.

"I-I'm fine! Don't worry!"

Bonds

“Alert Message, increased load on the distortion field. Any further combat action will be dangerous.”

But fortunately, Theia appeared from the flames unharmed. She then returned to Kiriha and the others. That said, her dress was scorched and dirtied from the explosion. Having taken several attacks from the enemy, Theia’s barrier was reaching its limit.

“Kiriha, our attacks have stopped hitting again!”

Theia reported the situation while swatting away the dirt from her face and dress.

“It’s like they’re reading your movements, Theia-chan.”

Shizuka mortifyingly grinded her teeth since the enemy didn’t let her close in. Now that the enemy had regained their ability to see the future, there was nothing she could do.

“Her forecasts have recovered, huh…”

“They seem to have regained the ability alongside the second gravity quake.”

Using the data that Ruth had gathered, Kiriha analyzed the situation.

“…A second gravity quake, their forecasts recovered… and why did…”

Kiriha’s expression didn’t have the same calmness to it as she did when laundering Koutarou’s clothes. Instead, she had the serious expression of a commander in combat.

“What do we do, Kiriha! At this rate we’ll die!”

Sanae knew how the battle was progressing better than anyone else. She could tell the state of everyone’s strength, energy and fighting spirit by looking at their auras. And currently, the magical girls were above them by quite a bit. At this rate, defeat was inevitable.

“…We attack.”

“Did you figure something out?!”

“Yeah. I only have a rough idea, but… luck really is on our side.”

Kiriha smiled confidently. But Sanae didn’t understand what Kiriha was saying so she leaned forward and asked for more details.

“I don’t understand if you put it like that! Explain in more detail!”

“Got it. I want you to move the way I say from now on. For starters.”

Kiriha explained her plan to Theia and the others.

“…Would something like that work?”

“Yeah. Judging how things have gone so far, there shouldn’t be any problems.”

Shizuka and the others hadn’t been expecting something like that, but Kiriha still had the same confident smile.

Part 2

Crimson and Green started feeling something was off as they started taking minor counter attacks. Green's forecasts were still accurate, and Crimson's powerful attacks continued damaging her enemies. But they would get surrounded by their enemies for just a moment and suffer counter attacks.

"Kuh, again?!"

Crimson frowned turned her mantle back over. As she did, the haniwas shot out electricity and fire. Crimson took some minor burns and felt a little numb in her hands.

"Green! Something's wrong!"

"I'm sorry! I don't really— Kyaaaaaaaa!"

"Green?!"

And another difference was that Green took her first big hit of the fight. They were all attacks that Green couldn't predict. Having relied on her forecast to fight, this was an attack she couldn't avoid.

"I-I'm fine! Somehow!"

"What's going on?!"

Crimson and Green were falling into a state of chaos. The forecasts were still accurate, yet they were taking minor hits, and sometimes attacks that hadn't been foreseen would come. This was a situation that neither Green nor Crimson had expected.

"…So this is what you'd call the egg of Columbus…"

Theia spoke a phrase she had just learned in class while she admired her own bullseye. Their struggle up until now seemed like just a dream.

"Just what are you doing?!"

Distancing herself, Crimson threw her question at Theia and the others. Despite the perfect forecasts, the enemy was surpassing them. She was so perplexed that she even asked her enemies for the answer.

"Nothing. If I were to say, it's that we understand the laws of nature of this world better than you."

Kiriha was the one to answer the question as she carefully observed Crimson and Green. Kiriha wasn't getting overconfident. She knew that even if she revealed the truth, the forecasts wouldn't start working again.

"That's not possible! Green's forecasts are perfect!"

"Indeed, your forecasts are perfect."

Kiriha affirmed Crimson's words. But even with her forecasts being perfect Kiriha and the others still had a chance to win.

"But even then there's a limit. Because of the uncertainty of the world, there's only so much you could see. And your own actions aren't taken into consideration or the forecasts would loop forever."

Because the future was uncertain, forecasts would see several futures. Green gave Crimson directions based on the most probable futures. And for the same reason, they could only see a little further into the future.

Whenever they would attack, the forecasts would affect their own actions, reducing the accuracy. Fighting using counter attacks was the most reliable way of dealing with forecasts.

“On top of that, there’s a limit to how often you can use magic to produce forecasts. On top of that, she had to convey everything she has seen to you.”

Since magic was used to see into the future, there was a limit to its use. And there was a limit to the information being conveyed, even when using a mental link. It wasn’t like the two had unlimited energy, perfect communication and instant thoughts.

“You should have finished this fight before we noticed that.”

The biggest problem was giving Kiriha enough time to figure out the characteristics of forecasts. She now understood the true nature of forecasts better than the magical girls. And using that understanding as her basis, she set up a strategy. That was the reason as to why the invader girls’ attacks started hitting.

“Impossible! How is that even possible?!”

“In the end, forecasts are just information. If the user is dominated by its forecast, it’ll lose things it could win.”

Kiriha’s plan was a very simple one.

First, use large scale attacks to force the magical girls to keep moving. Doing that, the magical girls own evasive actions will change the future, reducing the accuracy of the forecasts.

The invader girls would be divided into those who attacked first, and those who waited for Crimson to attack. That would make the forecasts that didn’t work that far into the future in the first place even less accurate, and make it harder for Crimson to dodge.

In other words, because Kiriha understood how the forecasts worked, the more accurate the forecast was, the more Crimson and Green would be dominated by it. If the magical girls relied a little less on the forecasts, this wouldn’t have happened. This was a crisis their overconfidence had caused.

“You shouldn’t have focused on just magic, but also tried to learn a little bit more about the world. This is the limit for sheltered girls.”

“That hurts, Kiriha.”

Theia laughed. When she had first come to room 106, she hadn’t known much about the world either. She had broken out of her shell now, but she felt a little embarrassed and felt as she was looking into a mirror.

“Your highness, I’ve finished altering the settings.”

“Alright! Blue Knight! Attack! I will leave everything to you!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Theia and Ruth were in charge of the trump attack.

“What are you doing?!”

“Who knows? Because not even I do.”

“Get away right now, Crimson! I can see hundreds of different attacks and I have no idea which one is coming!”

“What?!”

Following Kiriha’s instructions, Ruth had made changes to the Blue Knight’s settings. Normally, the Blue Knight’s artificial intelligence chose an appropriate weapon following Theia’s or Ruth’s instructions. Because of that, it would only make logical attacks, making it relatively easy to create forecasts.

However, Ruth had altered the settings to choose a weapon at random. As a result, the chances for any of the attacks to be chosen was equal. Even weapons for use in space might be chosen. Not even Theia knew what weapon would be chosen. The attack radius, target and weapon were all random. Green's forecasts were useless because of the irrational situation.

Simply put, one could say that future forecasts was the ultimate method of reading the opponent's habits. That's why if the attacker essentially rolled a dice to attack, forecasts wouldn't be accurate. And what's worse was that the dice had hundreds of sides. An accurate forecast was out of the question.

All Crimson and Green could do in this situation was fall back as quickly as possible. But that was exactly what Kiriha wanted. There was no need for Theia to actually attack. Her aim was to create a future that was impossible to predict and make Crimson and Green retreat.

"Gooo! Shizukaaaaa!"

"…To corner a fortune teller that can see the future with just your head… Kiriha-san, just what kind of brain do you have…?"

Being supported by Sanae, Shizuka chased after Green and Crimson. With her physical abilities enhanced by Sanae, it was easy to catch up to them.

"Mind Bla—"

"You're too slow!"

Shizuka's target was the fortune teller, Green. Having gotten within range, Shizuka sent her right fist flying towards Green, who was attempting to attack her. Shizuka's fist hit Green's jaw before she could finish her incantation.

"Guah?!"

And while Green was launched into the air by the attack, Shizuka attacked her repeatedly. She launched a combination attack of several punches, an elbow strike into a roundhouse kick, for a total of a seven hit combo, as Green collapsed onto the ground.

"Green!"

"You've finally come!"

Shizuka jumped backwards, and in the next instant Crimson swung her cane where she had been standing.

Crimson's cane slammed into the ground and cracked the asphalt.

"Aaaaaaahhhh?! The parking lot!"

Shizuka screamed. The battle between Shizuka and the others vs the magical girls was taking place in the parking lot behind Corona House. Of course, since it was her parents' heritage, she was deeply attached to it. So seeing the asphalt crack and shatter, she was incredibly shocked.

"I told you before… If you break something… I'll make you regret living…"

"You didn't, you didn't! You told us, Shizuka!"

"…Have you heard of bone breaking torture…? Apparently you start with the hands and feet, and break bones from small to large… ufu, ufufufu, ufufufufu!"

"You better hurry up and run away, Red! Once she's like this, you don't stand a chance!"

"Just the way I like it!"

Bonds

To Crimson who only sought power, going up against a martial arts expert was just what she wanted. She also had to save Green, so no one would be able to criticize her. Crimson grasped her cane in both hands and charged against Shizuka.

Her cane started transforming until it formed a spearhead and an axe's blade. They were made out of offensive magic and had no physical form. The cane weighed and handled like it normally did, but it now had the power of a great axe.

Crimson made use of her exceptional physical strength to spin it around like a pinwheel and swung the great axe at Shizuka.

"Take this!"

As the great axe tore through the air it headed for Shizuka at terrific speeds.

"Hmph!"

But having had her parking lot destroyed, Shizuka moved even faster. She moved at such speed that Crimson had no chance of hitting her without any forecasts.

"Haaaaaaaaaaa!"

Shizuka dashed in under the axe and thrust her hands forwards alongside a yell. She poured all of her weight and momentum into the strike and crushed the defensive spell that Crimson was wearing without any troubles.

"It's not over yet!"

But that wasn't enough to defeat Crimson. She didn't hesitate to drop her axe and pulled out a knife from the back of her waist and used it to attack Shizuka. The knife moved much faster than the axe, and it worked well in close combat. Its silver blade shone as Crimson attempted to run Shizuka through with it.

Bonds

“For you to be able to beat me on your own—”

Uwah?!”

However, Shizuka grabbed onto Crimson’s arm without any troubles and followed through by throwing her. Crimson wasn’t even given the time to fall properly.

“—You should have stuck to being either a pure warrior, or a pure magician.”

“Impossible!”

Along with a dull impact sound, Crimson’s body slammed into ground, right next to Green.

“Guah?!”

Having been slammed into the asphalt, Crimson lost consciousness and remained motionless. Once they lost their advantage of forecasts and long ranged magic attacks, the difference in ability was obvious. The invader girls had won after all displaying their own merits.

“Now then, what do we do with these girls…”

Despite having beaten them down, Shizuka was still boiling with anger and glared at the two collapsed magical girls.

“I wonder if they can repair the asphalt with magic. Ah, and if they can’t, they’ll just have to do it by hand…”

Corona House and its related facilities was Shizuka’s family keepsake. And now it was also the place where her new family returned to. And having damaged that, Shizuka wasn’t about to forgive the magical girls just by knocking them out.

“Quick Cast — Mystic Mist!”

The next moment, a dense fog wrapped the two collapsed girls.

“Crimson, keep it together!”

“Ah?! They’re escaping?!”

The fog was a magical mist that Green used for distractions. Neither Shizuka nor Sanae could see through it. And using this moment, Green grabbed Crimson and escaped.

“Blue Knight! Attack!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Theia had been able to track them using the Blue Knight’s heat sensor and radar, but she was only able to get off sporadic attacks. Lasers and beams would be highly ineffective in the mist, and she couldn’t point ballistic weaponry towards her surroundings. While that was going on, Green activated a new spell and completely hid their presence.

“Ahh, damnit! They got away before they could repair the parking lot!”

“So she was just faking it, or maybe she woke up just then… It seems I still have much to learn.”

“Let’s throw a net at them the next time they collapse.”

“Hmm, that sounds good… I’m sure the Blue Knight has some.”

“Yes. There is a net gun for riot suppression. I will prepare it.”

The party was mortified over letting the magical girls escape. But no one had said that they should have finished off the unconscious Green. They all felt that, neither this place, nor any of them, should be covered in blood.

“Shizuka-chan, leave it to us Ho-!”

“That’s right Ho-! We’re good at this kind of construction Ho-!”

“Really?! Please do!”

Eventually the mist faded away. And as expected, nobody was there. The invaders had allowed the magical girls to escape.

“But still… those two withdrew awfully easily…”

Theia continued her searching as she tilted her head. Theia’s intuition that the magical girls should have been able to use the cover of the mist to launch some more attacks.

“That might have been because of their forecast.”

Kiriha answered Theia’s doubts.

“A forecast? At this time?”

“Yes. With the properties of future forecasts being what it is, it would be more effectively used for macro futures, like for strategy or economy, rather than the micro futures in battle. Strategically speaking, pulling back here might have been more correct.”

“Strategy… Which means that they might be gathering their forces and going after Yurika or Koutarou?”

“That’s right. We should hurry up and meet with them too.”

With the magical girls’ goal being unclear, it would be difficult to figure out what they were after.

But regardless of whatever goal their enemy had, protecting Koutarou and Yurika couldn’t work against them.

“Ruth, Shizuka, could you stay behind? Just in case.”

“Yes, Kiriha-sama.”

“Got it. Be careful, you three.”

“Yeah! We’ll be right back with Koutarou and Yurika!”

“Then let’s go, men!”

Thus, Kiriha, Theia and Sanae left Corona House in order to save Koutarou and Yurika.

Part 3

Obeying Koutarou's summons, a knight sword and a metal rod similar to a flashlight appeared.

"Clan, what's this?"

"It's a test for dual wielding! We'll start out by using Signaltin with a beam sword!"

"I see!"

"Since the left weapon is a beam sword without physical form, there's no need to worry about inertia! And since the blade can be turned off, there's no need to worry about the two swords interfering with each other!"

"You really are a genius, Clan!"

There was a big problem with using a sword without physical form, and that was that despite having the same length as an actual sword, it was too easy to swing around and the user might end up hurting themselves.

In fact, accidents like that happened frequently when this type of weapon first appeared. As a result, there were few users of it, considering how useful it was, and it was only used as a weapon in case of emergencies for decades. The weapon didn't become commonly used until around a decade after safety devices that could withstand practical use had been developed, and the initial bad reputation had been rebuilt.

A beam sword's safety device worked by constantly keeping watch of its blade and turning off if it was about to hit its user. The sword did however function normally when cutting down opponents. Once this safety device had been built in, the beam sword became a lot safer and more convenient, and there was a considerable amount of people that used one in each hand. Thanks to the safety device, there was no need for any special training either.

As Clan was researching how to use two knight swords, she came up with the idea of using one beam sword. If it was just one sword, Koutarou should be able to control it with one hand. That's why, if the other was a beam sword, there shouldn't be any problem.

In order to use a knight sword like a beam sword, the sword's inertia and mass needed to be controlled and a hole in space and time was needed to be used to control its length. And the step before doing that, was using a knight sword in parallel to a beam sword.

Just as Clan had decided to test her theory in the field, she learned that the enemy was Maya. And in order to fight Maya, a beam sword was necessary, so this combination was inevitable in a sense.

"The algorithm for controlling two swords is still incomplete, so I think you'll run into some trouble! So don't put too much faith into the beam sword's automatic control! Try to use manual controls during the most important times!"

"Got it!"

Koutarou grabbed Signaltin's handle with his right hand and the beam sword's handle with his left. As he did, he heard a familiar phrase spoken to him by the artificial intelligence.

"Your Excellency, Blue Knight, this ship, the Cradle, will pray for your fortune and glory in place of the nation of Forthorthe."

"…Thank you."

As Koutarou grabbed a hold of Signaltin's handle, a large amount of pure-white magical power began overflowing. However, the magical power overflowing this time was only a fraction of what it normally was.

Bonds

The magical power is less than usual… Is it because of the contract with Aika-san? Or did her majesty save someone else?

Signaltin's magical power had weakened, but Koutarou took a stance, not really minding it too much. Excluding the special situation Koutarou was in, he was only planning on using two knight swords. Those were the only two weapons he had sworn an oath on. That's why it didn't matter if the magical power had weakened or not.

There were several mysteries surrounding Signaltin that Koutarou didn't understand. But because he believed in this sword that held Alaia's oath and emotions, he wasn't too bothered by the magical power weakening a little. He felt that it must have been needed for something else.

"I saw that white light before… but the light is stronger than back then… I see, so this is the true form?"

"That's right."

Even if the magical power had weakened a little, Signaltin was far more powerful than normal weapons. From a realistic point of view, there was no need for Koutarou to use another weapon either.

"But, I won't let you get away like you did eleven years ago! I'll kill you, this time for sure!"

Maya showed a violent expression and glared at Koutarou. She wasn't going to let Koutarou live, not when he had rejected her and chosen Yurika over her. She was fiercely jealous and boiling with rage from having her pride hurt.

"I haven't seen you like this before…"

Koutarou readied the sword in his right hand and adjusted the grip on the beam sword's handle in his left while looking at Maya's body.

Just how little of her original body does she even have left?

Trying to figure out what parts he could attack, Koutarou used his ability to see spiritual energy that he had gotten from Sanae, and found something unexpected.

Her only remaining real body parts consisted of the insides of her head and the vicinity around the center of her body. He could clearly see spiritual energy travel between them. What was strange was that the machinery was exchanging spiritual energy as well. Seeing that, Koutarou got a bad feeling.

Could this body be…

Some amount of spiritual energy could travel through artificial arms and legs, but this was far above that level. Though it wasn't at the same amount as a living body, the flow was just like that of a real body.

I guess I'll just have to find out…

Koutarou adjusted his grip on his sword. If things were the way he suspected, Maya had an abnormal amount of power.

"Then burn the charm of this body into your eyes until you die!"

"I think I'll pass!"

The two moved at the same time. The next moment, Maya fired the gun on her left arm and the bullets rapidly approached Koutarou.

"I'm counting on you, Signaltin!"

Bonds

Koutarou wished for Signaltin to use a defensive spell.

The bullets had their momentum slowed by the armor's barrier before being repelled by Signaltin's defensive spell. Signaltin had weakened, but all it had to do was stop the bullets that got past the armor's barrier, so there was no problem.

"You won't let me take it easy as always!"

"That goes both ways!"

Realizing that her gunfire wasn't effective, Maya changed the weapon on her left. The gun deployed on her left arm returned back into her body and a blade appeared on her left hand, the same as the one on her right. Maya closed in under the hopes of being able to deal more damage up close.

"Tiny Memory Flash — Modifier — Touch Trigger!"

The blades in both hands were covered in an indigo light. In the next moment, a girl's voice reached Koutarou's ear. It hadn't reached him as a sound, but as magic.

"Satomi-kun!"

"Aika-san!"

Koutarou replied the same way. The voice belonged to Aika Maki. She had formed a mental link between herself and Koutarou beforehand.

"The light on Maya-sama's hands are spells that will cause you to lose your memory! If you touch them you'll lose several seconds of your memory! It's my own and Maya-sama's specialty!"

"So it was memory loss that made it feel like I jumped forward in time!"

"Be careful! If you take that, you'll take on continuous attacks!"

"I got it! But, Aika-san…"

Koutarou laughed a little as he activated the beam sword.

"…You don't have to worry that much."

Not only did Maki's words reach Koutarou, but her worry for his well-being did as well. It was a strong and deep feeling.

"Stupid, you don't even know how I feel!"

"What are you laughing for?!"

Maki's and Maya's voices overlapped. Maya thought that the laugh was directed at her and got even angrier.

"My little angel is quite angry! I just found it so funny!"

"Meanie! You don't have to put it like that!"

"You're making a fool of me?! I'll make you regret that!"

Koutarou's beam sword and Maya's left blade collided. However, since the beam sword didn't have a physical form, the spell cast on it didn't activate. But Maya didn't stop there this time.

Using her right blade, she tried to pierce through Koutarou.

"Take this!"

Maya thrust her blade right behind Koutarou's beam sword. By doing that, Koutarou couldn't use his right sword as the beam sword was in the way. That's why Maya was convinced her attack would hit and her expression was distorted with wicked joy.

Bonds

“You’re good! However—!”

But Koutarou swung his sword down anyways, and at the same time, the beam sword’s blade was erased. As a result, his sword’s trajectory followed a straight line.

“Tsk!”

Surprised, Maya forcibly changed the trajectory of her right hand.

This time, the right handed weapons collided. Signaltin had a physical form, but it also had the ability to dispel magic, so Maya’s spell wasn’t activated this time either.

“So this is what she meant… You’re a lifesaver, Clan.”

“That weapon really is cheating!”

Maya kicked off of Koutarou and tried to distance herself. Koutarou followed up by slashing with his beam sword, but Maya performed a somersault midair and dodged it, escaping out of his range.

Damn, she has way more speed now…

Koutarou looked at Maya as he thought to himself. With her now artificial body, she was even faster than before. Koutarou was using spiritual energy to increase his physical strength and using Sanae’s power to see his opponent’s intention to attack, but Maya’s movements were too fast for him. He was in a bad spot, and then he got even worse news.

“Bertorion, I’ve figured out a little about the opponent. Whenever that woman moves, she emits an energy pattern that matches with data I have.”

“…What is it matching with?”

“Those robots that Kii always has with her.”

By Kii, Clan of course meant Kiriha. And by robots, she meant the two haniwas she had with her. In other words—.

“Cheating goes both ways as well… That body of yours was made by the underground people, right?”

“As expected from my boy… to think you even know of them…”

Hearing Koutarou’s words, Maya narrowed her eyes, and the fury in her eyes weakened. Recognizing how dangerous Koutarou was, she had regained her cool.

“But, now that you know that, you’ll have to die.”

Maya showed a cold blooded smile. It was beautiful, but it made a chill run down Koutarou’s spine.

“Not good… The situation might be more complex than we thought…”

Up until now, he had only had to deal with individual enemies. But since Maya’s body was made from spiritual energy machinery, and Maya herself was an evil magical girl, it would mean that Kiriha and Yurika’s enemies are working together. Which meant that they would eventually attack together. Just imagining that made Koutarou feel more threatened than Maya did.

Part 4

Seeing Koutarou and Maya fight, Yurika realized that she might be able to save Kanae now. Kanae was still collapsed on the floor covered with injuries, which Yurika had to heal. Kanae was holding onto Encyclopedia, so even if Yurika was out of power, she should still be able to treat Kanae. And with Encyclopedia, she would be able to support Koutarou a little.

“Sakuraba-senpai, please wait here.”

“You’re going to help Kanae-san, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll go too.”

“If we stand out too much, Maya will notice us. And I can’t protect you anymore right now, so please stay here.”

“…But… No, I understand. Please be careful, Nijino-san.”

Harumi wanted to go with Yurika. She believed that she should live and die by Yurika’s side. But she realized that she would just get in the way and that they would stand out more if the both of them went. That’s why Harumi unwillingly obeyed Yurika.

“I’ll be back.”

“Carefully, Nijino-san.”

“Yes.”

If Nijino-san fails, then it’ll be my turn… For now, I have to believe in her…

Harumi told herself as she saw Yurika off. Yurika snuck from cover to cover, carefully moving forward.

“I will stay here…”

Harumi looked back at Koutarou’s and Maya’s battle. She was going to warn Yurika if Maya noticed her.

Satomi-kun is strong… It’s like he’s the real Blue Knight…

As Harumi watched the battle, that thought snuck up on her. Harumi had some of Yurika’s memories, and in some of those memories, Koutarou was fighting as well, but the way he was now was much stronger now than how he was in those memories. Harumi couldn’t help but think about the blue armor he was wearing, or about the knight sword in his right hand.

Why am I so curious about those? And that crest engraved on his chest… it looks like it says ‘Theiamillis’s Blue Knight’… That’s referring to Satomi-kun’s friend, Theiamillis-san, isn’t it…?

Seeing Koutarou wear that blue armor and holding that sword, Harumi grew more and more unsettled. Her feelings for Koutarou overflowed from her heart and questioned if Harumi should really just sit here and do nothing. That said, she didn’t know what to do. Confused and unsettled, she watched Koutarou and Maya with great focus. Because of that, she didn’t realize that the words engraved on Koutarou’s chest made of use of characters she couldn’t normally read.

The Blue Knight… Theiamillis’s Blue Knight… Satomi-san… Koutarou-sama… What is this, I feel like I know something… What exactly do I… the sword… is that Signaltin…?

Harumi was lost in thought when a sword-like crest started appearing on her forehead. As it did, Harumi could recall all kinds of memories.

Bonds

An old temple… A rusted sword… Satomi-kun and I… I revived the sword, and gave it to Koutarou-sama… Is this a scene from the play? No, this kind of place wasn't in the play… Then what? Is it from my dreams? Is it from one of Nijino-san's memories? Or is it really mine?

Each memory Harumi recalled only served to confuse her more. She felt like it might have been from the play, but at the same time maybe not. But it was quite a bit too far off to be reality. Unable to differentiate from the play and reality, Harumi's confusion didn't look like it would settle down anytime soon.

That was when it happened.

"Oh crap?!"

"You're mine!"

The beam saber in Koutarou's left hand didn't activate properly and left him wide-open in front of Maya. Not missing her chance, Maya thrust her blade at him.

"Satomi-kun! Satomi-kuuun!"

Harumi screamed, but that wouldn't stop Maya. What Harumi needed was real power, a power strong enough to save Koutarou. If not, she wouldn't be able to teach him how to knit a sweater.

But Harumi couldn't do anything but helplessly watch as Koutarou was about to be pierced by Maya's blade. It was just a very short moment, but to Harumi it felt like an eternity. That was just how painful it felt.

"Noooooooooooooooo! Koutarou-samaaaaaaa!"

Unable to bear that pain, Harumi let out another scream.

"Harumi."

Along with someone's voice, Harumi's world stopped. Not Koutarou, Maya, Yurika nor Kanae moved. Nobody could, except for Harumi. And that was just her mind.

"Who's there?!"

Unable to shift her glance, Harumi called out to the owner of the voice. But since she couldn't form any words, she simply ended up shouting in her mind.

"I am you… and you are me…"

That was when a lone girl appeared in front of Harumi. It was as if she was looking into a mirror as the girl looked just like her. But the color of her hair and the clothes she was wearing were different. The girl had silver hair, and she was wearing a pure-white dress similar to what Harumi had worn on stage.

"W-What do you mean?!"

"I'm sorry, there's no time to explain…"

The silver haired Harumi shook her head apologetically.

"Harumi… do you love Koutarou-sama?"

She turned to look at Koutarou who was still unmoving.

"Of course! That's why I have to hurry and do something! At this rate, Satomi-kun will die."

Harumi shouted.

In this stopped world, Koutarou looked like he were to be stabbed by Maya any moment.

"I see… So you wish to save him?"

Bonds

“Yes! You don’t?! Aren’t you me too?!”

“Yes… I wish to save him too… I love him just as much as you do…”

“Then help me! Two’s better than one! Before Satomi-kun dies!”

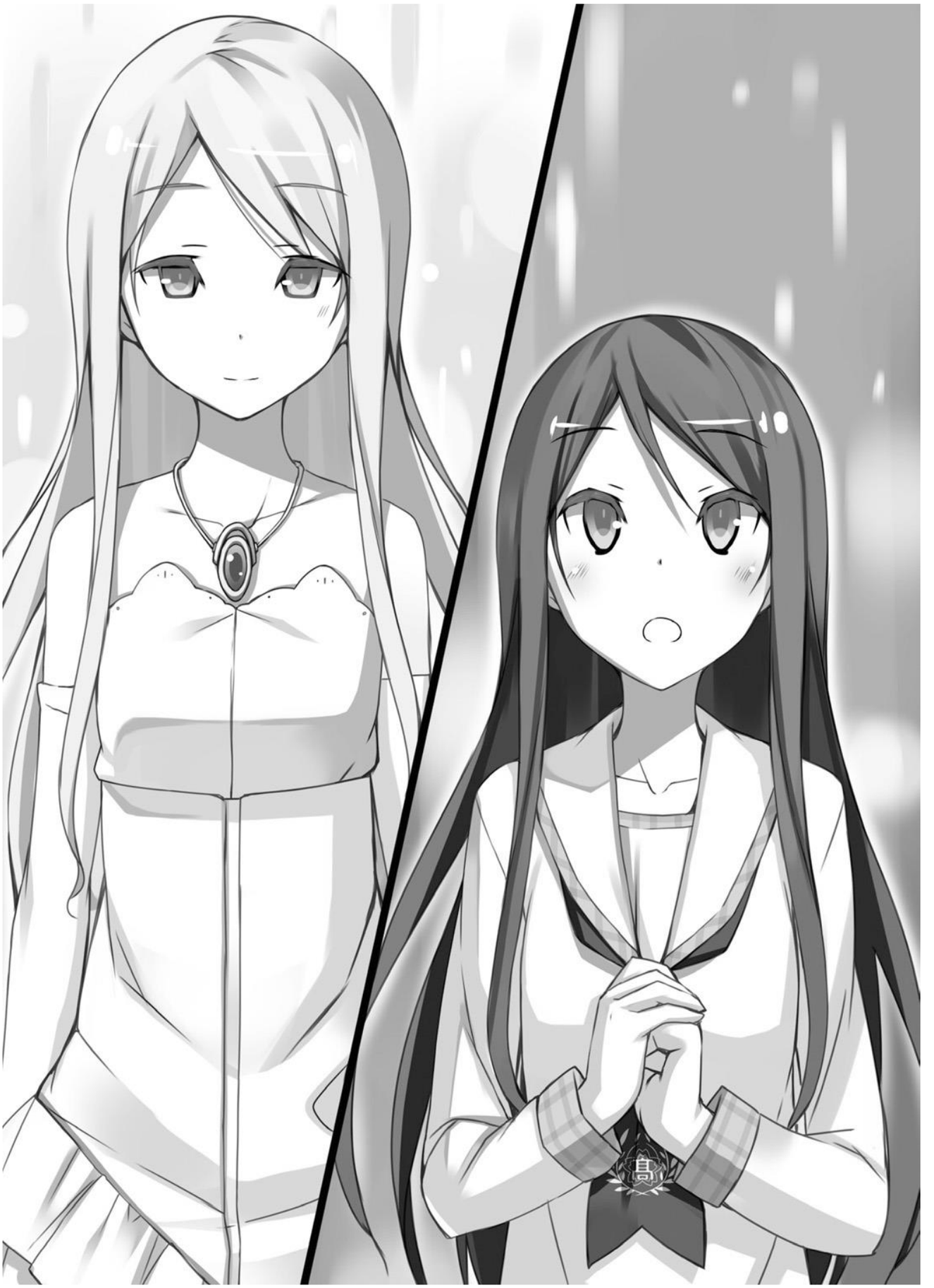
“…Certainly, I have the power to save him. However, I can’t do it myself. All I can do is entrust my powers and memories to someone and have them succeed my duty.”

The silver haired Harumi looked down with a sad expression. She believed it was a sinful thing to do.

“Then I will do it! If that will save Satomi-kun.”

“If you succeed my duty, you will no longer be able to live a normal life. Even then, would you still do it?”

The silver haired Harumi didn’t think one could be happy throwing away their normal life and casting themselves into the battle. In order to find happiness there, one needed powerful emotions and oaths, or they would live unhappily.



Bonds

“Even if that’s not the case, I will be with Satomi-kun, won’t I?!”

“Yes. Even if you were to be separated by an endless time and a countless distance—”

“Then I don’t care what happens to me! As long as I can walk alongside Satomi-kun!”

Harumi had powerful emotions and oaths. She wanted to protect the person dear to her. She wanted to teach him how to knit a sweater. And for that cause, she was ready to throw away everything.

Harumi… you too are…

The silver haired Harumi knew Harumi’s feelings painfully well. It was as if she was looking at her past self. That’s why she was able to make her decision.

“…I understand. Harumi, I will entrust you with everything.”

The silver haired Harumi nodded and smiled. She felt like she could trust and believe in Harumi. The silver haired Harumi’s body was wrapped in a pure-white light, and in that light her body gradually lost its shape as she began to assimilate into the light.

“But… please don’t forget. Your life is yours in the end. You mustn’t be influenced by my memories. Just think of my memories… Yes, think of them as a product of getting into your role in the play.”

“Play? Role? Wait, could you be—”

“I am you. I was you before you. And like you, I loved the same person.”

In the next moment, the silver haired Harumi’s shape completely vanished, and she turned into that pure-white light.

“Could you be, the Silver—”

The light was then poured into Harumi’s body.

“Good bye, Harumi… We will probably never meet again. Live your own life… and if possible, stay with him until the end, this time…”

Once she had become one with the light, Harumi felt a love as deep as her own for Koutarou.

Part 5

Koutarou and Maya's battle was growing more intense and fierce by the second. Koutarou made up for the overwhelming difference in speed with skill and experience. Adding in the armor and the power of his weapons, they were about equal.

"This is bad, Bertorion! I can't keep up with the errors the algorithm is spitting out anymore! Take some distance and let's reset it!"

"She's not the kind of opponent that would give me the time to do that!"

Koutarou shouted at Clan and called out to Maki in his mind.

"Aika-san, for how much longer will the spell you cast on me last?!"

"You're just about out of them! Maya-sama still has plenty of time left, so if you fight after you've run out, you probably won't be able to block her attacks!"

"Kuh, I guess I'll have to continue like this then!"

Koutarou muttered to himself in a frustrated tone and swung Signaltin at Maya. However, Maya quickly moved out of the sword's arc.

"What's the matter, boy?! Your movements are getting duller!"

"Not yet!"

The saber won't make it in time! I'll just continue like this!

Holding the beam sword in his left hand, Koutarou swung his fist at Maya.

Since this had been an unexpected attack, Maya was struck by Koutarou's fist. But she wouldn't just let herself get punched. As she was falling back, she swung her blades down and left large scars on Koutarou's armor.

"How are you going to repay me for this, boy? You've dented the area around my chest."

"Alert Message. The damage of the chest armor has exceeded 78%. The next attack to the same part has a 90% chance of mortally wounding the wearer."

Maya's and the armor's complaints reached Koutarou's ears at the same time.

Both Koutarou and Maya could beat one another if their attacks hit. Maya had less magical power than before, so her magical defenses were weaker, leaving her with no means to protect herself from Signaltin. And at the same time, despite Maki having cast some protection on Koutarou's armor, it was unable to withstand Maya's spiritual energy infused attacks. With both sides only one hit away from defeat, speed and technique continued to clash.

"…What's so bad about it? Now you have an excuse to get bigger breasts."

"Hmm, I was worried that you wouldn't be able to go on, being out of breath and all, but if you keep talking like that, then it looks like I can enjoy this date for a little longer."

However, this situation was more disadvantageous for Koutarou. Unlike Maya, whose body was almost nothing but machinery, Koutarou was flesh and bone beneath his armor. Because of that, his movements were more limited and his body grew more exhausted the longer the fight continued. If the evenly matched battle continued on for much longer, Koutarou would lose. And since she knew that, Maya was showing a confident smile.

Crap… do I have to finish this right now?

The system controlling his two swords was letting out cries and his armor was continually warning him. On top of that, Koutarou was out of breath and exhausted. He wouldn't be able to go all out for much longer.

Bonds

But… how do I catch her? I'm this powered up and I still can't catch up.

Having gotten a mechanical body, Maya's movements surpassed the limits of man. Since Koutarou couldn't escape from the bonds of his body, he was stuck at that limit. So in order for him to catch up to Maya, he needed to come up with a good idea. But Maya wasn't going to give him time to think.

"There's still plenty of time! Let's have some more fun, my dear boy!"

"Don't give me that crap! I just escaped from a date with your disciple!"

Maya's blades had a red light around them as she dashed forward with a smile.

"Satomi-kun, she has attack spells cast on both of her blades! Don't fall for her words, she's going for the finishing blow!"

"So she's coming! In that case—!"

Koutarou changed his fighting style in accordance to Maki's advice.

Since Maki knew Maya and magic very well, she had saved Koutarou several times already. And now, her advice gave him his last chance of victory.

If she's going to finish me off, she should be targeting the damaged chest plate! As long as I know where she's going to be attacking…!

"Ooooooooo!"

Koutarou swung Signaltin, putting all of his force behind it. The blade cut through the air and headed straight for Maya.

"Woops! That was close♪"

However, Maya lowered her posture a little and dodged it.

But that was just what Koutarou was aiming for. His goal was to limit Maya's mobility by swinging Signaltin. And if she was now aiming for his chest, then there weren't many paths she could take.

"Now it's my turn!"

Maya headed down the path Koutarou had expected. Koutarou moved his left and placed his beam sword in Maya's path. Now as long as the blade activated, the events would develop exactly the way he had expected.

However.

Along with a noisy sound, the armor reported an error with the beam sword. Because of his overuse of the malfunctioning system, the beam sword had lost its function at the worst possible time.

"Oh crap?!"

"You're mine!"

With the beam sword failing to activate, Koutarou was left completely defenseless as Maya pressed her charge. The blade in her right hand had an ominous red glow to it. She was aiming for Koutarou's torso, the spot where the armor had cracked.

"Bye bye, boy. I loved you."

Maya thrust her right hand forward.

Koutarou steeled himself. He would die the moment she thrust her blade through his armor. It was now an unavoidable fact.

Bonds

“Nooooooooooo! Satomi-kun, Satomi-kuuun!”

Koutarou could hear Maki screaming in his mind. At the same time, Maya’s hand was pushing forward and closing in on him. Maya’s face twisted with malice and a dark joy spread throughout her chest.

“Nooooooooooooo!”

It was in that moment that Signaltin began glowing brightly. And it was as powerful as the girl’s voice that filled the area.

“Kyaaa?!”

Maya’s body received a large shock and she was sent flying. It was as if she had been thrown back by the glow and the voice.

“What?!”

However, it had no effect on Koutarou at all. He simply stood there, wrapped in that light. He noticed that the light had a pulse. Sensing that the pulse was similar to that of a person’s heartbeat, a girl’s name appeared in Koutarou’s head.

“…This, is… her majesty’s…? Her majesty, Alaia’s…?”

He felt the warmth he had felt in the past when Alaia had been controlling Signaltin directly. That’s what he felt right now, but that was impossible. Alaia was an endless time and a countless distance away. There was no way she could be here. But Alaia’s sword was radiating. Her oath and wish was still glowing.

“Your majesty!”

Guided by the light, Koutarou turned around. There, he saw a lone girl standing. It was a girl with long hair and a crest of a sword glowing on her forehead. At first, it had looked like her hair was silver colored.

“Alaia— No! Is that?!”

But he quickly realized he had made a mistake. The girl’s hair was black. The person standing there was not the person he was looking for.

“…Sakuraba-sen…pai?”

Temporarily disappointed over the person not being Alaia, Koutarou soon found himself surprised again.

Why is Sakuraba-senpai controlling Signaltin?! And that crest on her forehead is the same as her majesty’s… What is going on?!

While Koutarou was too confused to say anything, Harumi herself started shedding tears and struggled to speak.

“…Thank god… he’s alive… Satomi-kun is alive…”

With the crest still glowing on her forehead, Harumi shed tears of relief. Koutarou who was about to die was alive and well. Relieved by that, Harumi continued crying.

“…I’m glad… I’m really so glad…”

“Sakuraba-senpai, what is this? How are you controlling Signaltin?!”

“…I don’t know… I don’t know what is going on…”

Harumi shook her head at Koutarou’s question. She was confused as well. She had seen that Koutarou was about to lose his life and felt like she had to save him. She had prayed for that.

And by doing that, light suddenly started overflowing from her body, causing Koutarou's sword to glow and to send the enemy flying. This came as a surprise to Harumi as well, as she simply continued to cry.

"…But… Satomi-kun… there's one thing… that I do know…"

Harumi looked at Koutarou with tears falling from her eyes.

"…And that is that from now on, I will protect you—"

A strong resolve and love resided in those eyes.

And driven by that intense and deep emotion, she continued.

"—and always be at your side…"

In that moment, the crest on Harumi's forehead started glowing even brighter. At the same time, Signaltin grew even more powerful.

What is going on?! This isn't her majesty, but Sakuraba-senpai, yet, she can control Signaltin as well as her majesty… No, even better?!

Signaltin was radiating light.

The glow was brighter than anything Koutarou had ever seen.

"…So win, Satomi-kun! I will protect you, from any enemy and any hardship!"

And as those words left Harumi's mouth, all the confusion and hesitation vanished from Koutarou's mind.

There is no point in asking who and why! If the rusted iron scrap is still glowing like this, if the oath and emotion put into this sword still remain—!

"—Then I will use my life and everyone's powers to protect our future! Sakuraba-senpai!"

Having been separated by an endless time and a countless distance, the previous relationship of master and servant had changed into that of a senior and junior, and connected that oath and emotion once more.

Bonds

Part 6

Having regained her balance, Maya faced Koutarou without flinching, despite Signaltin continuously growing in power.

“No matter how much magical power you have, it doesn’t mean a thing if you don’t hit!”

Maya attacked Koutarou. She charged at him with the fastest speed she could possibly move at. The mechanisms were screeching and the system was giving her countless warnings, but Maya swung her blades widely as if to shake all of that off of her.

Signaltin had grown more powerful, but it had been weaker to start with, so now it wasn’t all that different from what Maki had reported before. On top of that, Maya was convinced she wouldn’t be hit. Having surpassed the limits of man, Maya wasn’t scared of her opponent.

“…You misunderstand.”

“What?!”

Signaltin easily blocked Maya’s blades. Of course, Maya was moving too fast for the sword itself to block, but her attack was stopped by the barrier that Signaltin was emitting.

Why?! It’s not that much more powerful than Maki had reported, so why can’t I break through this force field?!

Maya was astonished.

The spiritual energy weapons that Maya was using should be able to break through magical defensives quite effectively. According to Maki’s report on Signaltin’s capabilities, they were powerful enough to break through any defense Signaltin could output. So even if Signaltin had grown a little more powerful, her weapons should still be able to destroy the barrier. Yet despite that, the blades didn’t stand a chance. It was an unthinkable situation.

“This is that type of sword.”

“I see, that girl is doing something, isn’t she?!”

Maya shifted her look to Harumi who was behind Koutarou. Harumi had her eyes closed and her hands clasped together as if she was praying.

Maya could see a line of magical power traversing from Harumi to Signaltin. She had also received a report on Harumi from the last time Maki had fought Koutarou. That’s why she knew that Harumi could control some unknown form of magic. So it was hard to imagine that Harumi was unrelated to all this.

“…That’s right.”

Realizing that he wouldn’t be able to hide it from Maya, Koutarou confirmed her suspicions.

“This sword was made to be used by two people. It simply hadn’t been able to until now. That’s why you only know of the incomplete form of this sword. You misunderstood, Maya.”

Koutarou would wield the sword while another controls its magical power. They would control the magic and release it for attack or defense, and also change its properties depending on the opponent’s offense and defense. They also used the sword’s surplus magical power to use magic and support the wielder.

The two work as one.

And that is Signaltin’s true form. It was the power that Alaia gave to Koutarou to protect him.

“Impossible!”

“Go on, Satomi-kun! Do whatever you want! I’ll keep up with you!”

Bonds

“That’s why if you think that the sword’s power just got stronger, then—”

Harumi’s voice was conveyed to Koutarou through the sword as he casually swung the sword at Maya. As he did, the magical power being used to protect him changed shape and increased his attack range. The range was altered based on how Maya was moving, making it harder for her to dodge. It also had an electric property to it, causing the most damage possible to her.

“Kyaaaaaa?!”

The strike broke through the magical barrier Maya was using and shocked her. The impact was terrific and she was thrown to the ground as she was being shocked.

“—that’s what’ll happen.”

That was where Koutarou stopped his attack, but Harumi didn’t stop there. She started incanting something in ancient Forthorthe.

“Gather, spirits of the wind, gather as an arm and destroy my enemy! Roar! Air Sledgehammer!”

As a result, Signaltin’s surplus magical power turned into a giant hammer of air that fell down onto the collapsed Maya.

“H-How is this even possible?! This is completely different from before!”

Maya desperately moved her body in an attempt to dodge Harumi’s attack.

She managed to avoid the attack just barely, and that was only thanks to her superhuman speed. If not for that, she probably would have lost right there.

“I’m sorry, Satomi-kun! I was a little too slow!”

“No, that’s great, Sakuraba-senpai!”

Koutarou smiled and readied his sword. He actually knew the reason why Harumi’s attack had missed. Even though Maya’s body was mostly machine, Harumi was hesitant to attack another person. That’s why Maya had been able to avoid it. But Koutarou felt that was fine. Fighting didn’t suit Harumi, Koutarou felt the same way he did about Yurika.

“I will attack! Please focus on supporting me, senpai!”

“Okay, I understand!”

Koutarou chased after Maya and charged forwards. As Maya got up, she changed her blade weapons into guns and aimed for Harumi.

“Then I’ll just do this! That girl is your Achilles’ heel!”

And unlike Harumi, Maya didn’t hesitate to pull the trigger. She fired a large amount of bullets towards Harumi who was in her praying pose.

“Protection From Soul Energy! And please, Encyclopedia!”

However, two barriers stood in the way of the bullets. Yurika had cast a barrier to protect Harumi from spiritual energy, and she also used the cane in her hand to cast a spell to defend from physical attacks. Thanks to the two defensive spells, Maya’s bullets were completely blocked.

“Are you okay, Sakuraba-senpai?!”

“Thank you, Nijino-san!”

“Satomi-san, I will protect Sakuraba-senpai! Don’t worry!”

Yurika no longer had enough magical power to defeat Maya. However, she still had enough to cast a few defensive spells, and she had also gotten Encyclopedia from Kanae. That’s why she would be able to protect Harumi for a while.

“Yurika, I’ll leave that to you!”

“Yes!”

She would do what she needed when she had to. That’s the kind of person Yurika was to Koutarou.

“Curse you, Yurikaaaaaa!”

Having had her attack stopped by Yurika and being shown Koutarou’s trust on her, Maya was driven by an intense fury and jealousy. Being thought of as below Yurika by anyone was an unbearable humiliation to her.

“I’ll kill you, kill you all! All of you!”

Fury and jealousy turned into hate and drove Maya to attack. She no longer looked anything like the mind controlling magician, Dark Navy.

“Maya-sama…”

Watching over the battle, Maki’s feelings were quite complex.

I’m sure I was once like that too…

Looking at Maya the way she was right now made Maki feel sad. She also felt sorry as she thought that she must have looked like this in the past as well. That’s why Maki made a wish.

“Satomi-kun, please don’t kill Maya-sama…”

“Don’t worry, I understand. She is still your master, right?”

Maya was getting emotional and was full of openings, and all alone.

Koutarou on the other hand remained calm and was fighting with his friends.

The conclusion of this battle was already decided.

“Thank you, Satomi-kun…”

“No, that really helps. I’m a half-assed soldier that can’t kill people on my own.”

In order to actually finish the fight, Koutarou raised Signaltin above his head. At the same time, he focused on Kiriha’s gauntlet on his left hand and created a fireball. He used Sanae’s power to see Maya’s movements, and he was being protected by Ruth, Theia and Clan’s armor, along with Yurika’s and Maki’s magic. And Shizuka was protecting the place he wished to return to even now.

Ten versus one… Sanae said allies of justice could gang up on their foes, but… this might be overdoing it a little…

Koutarou swung his sword down on Maya, aiming for her arm.

Signaltin cut straight through Maya’s blades and chopped off her right arm.

“Guah?!”

And as she momentarily stopped, the fireball produced by his left gauntlet attacked her.

The fireball exploded by the center of her body and sent her flying.

“Uh, d-damnit… To think I would be this cornered by anyone other than Nana!”

Having been slammed into the ground, Maya used her remaining left arm to lift her body. Though the armor plate covering her torso had been destroyed and revealed the machinery behind it. Maya had taken a lot of damage, and was unable to properly move.

“Checkmate.”

Bonds

Koutarou lowered his sword as he faced Maya.

“Just give up and go home.”

“…Kill me. If you don’t, I’ll just come after you, over and over again.”

Maya’s body was seriously damaged, but the hatred in her eyes was as livid as ever. Maya directed a fierce killing intent towards Koutarou, as if he was a lover that had betrayed her.

“I bet you will…”

Koutarou was aware of the risk, but he couldn’t kill Maya. And so, he returned the sword to its sheath.

Maya took this as an insult and her hate grew even more powerful.

“You’ll regret this!”

“Yeah. I’ve always been regretting. That’s the kind of life I’ve lived. I’m used to it.”

Koutarou smiled wryly as he said that and turned his glance towards a concrete pillar nearby.

“And are the two of you hiding over there going to fight me too?”

Koutarou spoke out towards the pillar, and behind it, two magical girls, Crimson and Green, appeared. However, neither of them looked like they were going to fight.

“Are you joking? If I’m going to fight against a monster like you, I’ll have to make proper preparations first.”

“…We only came to save Maya-san.”

“I see. Then take her and leave.”

Koutarou couldn’t sense any intention to attack from their words or from their auras. That’s why he took several steps back and gave them room. The girls ran up to Maya with their eyes filled with hostility towards Koutarou.

“Are you okay, Maya-san?”

“I’ll lend you my shoulder.”

“…Yes…”

Maya somehow managed to stand up with the help of the two girls. But even then, her focus was directed at Koutarou rather than her allies. Unable to admit that had been the reason for her loss.

“…Boy, what is your name?”

“Koutarou.”

“…Koutarou… The next time we meet… I will definitely kill you, with my own hands…”

“If that’s what you want, then don’t come alone.”

“Hmph.”

Maya turned her face away from Koutarou and left with the support of the two girls. Eventually, they disappeared into the darkness of the far side of the abandoned building.

“…Bertorion, are you okay with just letting her go like that?”

Clan had a concerned look on her face on the other side of the communication device.

“Clan, is the person you want to make a vassal the kind of guy that would one-sidedly kill the other party?”

“Of course not! I was just worried for your safety! That’s why I was wondering if you were fine with not capturing her?!”

“…Just believe that I’ll win next time too. That’s what I’ve decided to do.”

Our future is bright.

That is what Koutarou had told Maki, and he had decided to believe in that as well.

“…Geez… you really don’t understand a woman’s feelings.”

“I hear that a lot.”

As Koutarou laughed, a space-time hole appeared in front of him.

“Clan?”

“I’m retrieving Signaltin. Theiamillis-san and the others are on their way to you right now.”

“That’s too bad.”

Koutarou realized what Clan was trying to do and pushed Signaltin into the hole. The hole took Signaltin with it and vanished.

“Now just do what you have to do before Theiamillis-san comes.”

“Sorry for always making you help me.”

“You’re not joking. Just when was this role assigned to me…”

The hologram of Clan puffed up her cheeks a little in dissatisfaction. Seeing that expression, Koutarou chuckled and honestly stated what he felt.

“Well, that would be around the time you became a worthy princess.”

“S-Stupid!”

Clan’s face turned red as she yelled at Koutarou before she one-sidedly turned off her communication.

“I got her angry again… I was trying to praise her too…”

Koutarou smiled wryly as he looked at the hologram not projecting anything. After Koutarou turned off his communication, he decided to heed Clan’s advice and do what he had to do.

“…Now then… where should I start explaining… There’s not much time either…”

Before Theia arrived, Koutarou had some explaining to do to the several people looking at him.

The Day of Beginnings

Part 1

Saturday, April 24

On that night, eleven people gathered in room 106. With that many people in the small room full of furniture, it was hard to even move.

Right next to Koutarou were Maki and Clan who seemed a little uncomfortable. Next to them were Harumi and Yurika. Facing those two were Theia, Ruth and Kiriha who were drinking tea, Shizuka, Sanae and Kanae.

“Koutarou, should I really be here?”

“Yeah, Satomi-kun. Just a while ago I was everyone’s enemy…”

“Just shut up and sit down.”

Koutarou wanted to properly introduce Maki and Clan. The two now allied themselves with Koutarou, but because of their history with the girls of room 106, they tried to distance themselves. However, Koutarou didn’t think very well of that and decided to use this chance to solve the problems regarding these two.

“So… I’ll start by introducing them. This is Clan…”

As Koutarou said that, he tapped Clan on the head a few times with his right hand. Because of the uncomfortable situation she was in, Clan couldn’t raise her head. She was pulling back because just a few months ago she had been after Theia’s and Koutarou’s lives. She simply looked at the tea table in front of her without moving a muscle.

“And this is Aika Maki-san.”

This time, Koutarou tapped Maki on the head with his left hand. Maki was practically in the same situation as Clan and had a stiff expression and was all tensed up. Because she knew that she was in front of Kanae and Sanae, she didn’t dare look at them. Because of her uneasiness, she was tightly holding onto Koutarou’s sleeve and wasn’t letting go.

“Clan and I went missing during the play, if you all remember. Back then, we reluctantly had to work together and our feelings of hostility gradually waned. Ever since, she has secretly been helping me. Like the incident with Sanae for example… Hey, don’t just be quiet, say something, Clan.”

“Say something? L-Like what?”

Clan couldn’t come up with anything to say. She knew that she couldn’t get friendly with everyone after what she had done.

“Like your name or something.”

“…I’m Clariossa Daora Forthorthe.”

“You really only said your name.”

“B-Because you told me to say it!”

Being so anxious, Clan only spoke her name, but her interaction with Koutarou showed everyone in the room what kind of relationship they had.

“Well, anyways… about Aika-san… As you all know, Aika-san is our classmate… but as it turns out, up until today she was actually an evil magical girl.”

“…”

The Day of Beginnings

When Koutarou revealed her identity, Maki held her breath and grabbed onto Koutarou's sleeve even harder. She was well aware of her poor position.

"Aika-san became an evil magical girl because her savior was one, but in the end, being evil didn't suit her. Aika-san saved me. And in her heart, she's an honest and good girl. She had no choice but to do evil because she had nowhere else to go, and in order to repay the kindness she had been shown."

"…Satomi-kun, I'm going home. I don't belong here…"

Unable to endure the tension, Maki pulled on Koutarou's sleeve and wished to leave room 106. However, Koutarou grabbed a hold of Maki's arm and shook his head.

"Just sit down right there. If you run away now, where will you go?"

"T-That's…"

"You have to start your new life. You get that, right?"

"…Yes."

Maki who had been starting to get up was persuaded by Koutarou and sat back down.

She had chosen the life of Aika Maki over the life of Dark Navy. That's why she no longer had a place in Darkness Rainbow. In order for her to live as herself, she had to face her past.

"We're pretending that Aika-san has been caught and is now our hostage until things calm down. If we don't, they'll come after her to finish off the traitor. But in reality, she is our classmate as always."

After saying that, Koutarou looked at everyone in the room before continuing.

"And this is just my request, and… I know it might be emotionally difficult, but I want you to get along with these two. Please."

Koutarou put his hands on the tea table and lowered his head. Maki and Clan to his sides followed his lead and lowered their heads as well. The two stiffened up as the time of reckoning had come.

"There's something I want to say."

Theia raised her hand. Seeing that, Clan's face turned pale.

"I-I do too!"

"I have one thing to say too."

Next, Sanae and Yurika raised their hands. This caused Maki's face to turn pale as well.

People that would ask them to pay for their crimes had appeared.

Though they feared the situation, they were ready to accept any criticism because they knew this was a passage they had to cross.

"Go ahead."

Having raised his head, Koutarou urged the three who had raised their hands to speak. The girls put their hands down on the tea table and leaned forward as they spoke.

"Does that mean that Clan will be put into the rotation for cleaning duty of this room?!"

"Hey, Maki! You're a magical girl too, right?! Let's make a new outfit for you to match ours!"

"Satomi-san, living in the wardrobe any more is impossible! Now that Maki-chan is joining, I want to leave the wardrobe and live here too!"

“‘…Eh?”’

However, what the three girls had said caused Clan and Maki to let out an astonished voice at the same time. They hurriedly raised their heads and looked at the people that had spoken to them.

“Well, I guess it would.”

“Alright! Now I only have to clean once a week!”

“Isn’t that great, your highness?”

“Satomi-san, now is the time to increase my residential area!”

“That’s a no.”

“Why?!”

“I can’t let Aika-san stay in the wardrobe.”

“Mama! I need drawing paper!”

“Yes, yes. Maki-chan, that’s what’s happening, so are you free next weekend?”

Nobody criticized Clan or Maki. Not Theia, Yurika, Sanae nor Kanae, nor did any of the other girls. In fact, they welcomed them.

“Aika-san, if you have nowhere to stay, why don’t you live with me? It’s just above this room.”

“Isn’t that great, Clan-sama. Now I don’t have to sneak around when meeting with you.”

“Wh…Why…?”

“Why isn’t anyone saying anything…?”

This situation confused both Maki and Clan. Despite supposedly being enemies, the residents of this room had easily accepted them. Not understanding what was going on, the two simply sat there with a confused look.

“…That’s because we were all enemies once too.”

Kiriha was the one to answer their question. She slightly narrowed her eyes and showed Clan and Maki a friendly smile. She especially trusted Clan, whom she had met eleven years ago.

“If we were to criticize you, we would be rejecting ourselves, and that is something we cannot do.”

At first, everyone was attacking each other. They had overcome that to get to where they were now. That’s why no one in the room criticized Clan or Maki. Everything was fine as long as they had a change of heart. What was important was the now, not the past.

“But Kii, even then—”

“Of course, that’s not the only reason.”

Being called Kii by Clan, Kiriha’s expression changed into an even gentler one.

“Satomi Koutarou lowered his head for your sake. In that case, we just have to believe him. We will accept anything he has decided… Isn’t that the same for you two?”

“That’s…”

“Yes, it is.”

Maki was still half in doubt, but Clan’s expression softened up a little. Having an old friend here helped a lot.

The Day of Beginnings

“Theiamillis-san, I formally apologize for my actions up until today.”

Clan bowed towards Theia, and in return, Theia nodded with a smile.

“I accept that apology. Don’t worry about it anymore. We may be rivals, but we reach further heights by competing with respect for each other, rather than hate.”

“Theiamillis-san… You’re right, I won’t lose!”

“Fufufu… that’s the spirit. I won’t lose either!”

Clan and Theia laughed at one another. Seeing that, Maki looked at Yurika and the Higashihongan family pair.

“Satomi-kun.”

“Yes.”

Noticing that, Koutarou and Harumi had Yurika and Maki face each other. Yurika only seemed confused, but Maki suddenly tried to make a run for it. However, Koutarou grabbed onto her with both hands and stopped her. After that, Maki finally gave up and slowly started speaking.

“I’m sorry, Nijino Yurika. I’ve done a lot of terrible things to you.”

“It’s fine, Maki-chan. If we each had the other’s saviors, I might have been the one apologizing…”

Yurika also accepted Maki’s apology. Nana had been the one to save Yurika, but that was just by chance. Having seen Maki’s change up close, Yurika felt almost no hostility towards her. The only thing still bothering her was that Maki was still an official member of Darkness Rainbow. But she also knew that Maki couldn’t leave right away in these circumstances, so she decided not to think about it.

“And to Kanae-san and her daughter, it seems my master did some horrible things to you…”

“That is not your fault, Maki-chan.”

“Mama, did something happen in the past?”

“It did, but that has been resolved and has nothing to do with Maki-chan.”

“Hmm. Oh well.”

“…Thank you very much.”

Maki lowered her head one last time.

As such, Clan and Maki were accepted by the girls of room 106, and took the first step of their new lives.

Part 2

Though Clan and Maki's problems had been solved, Koutarou had one more problem remaining.

And that was the problem of what to do with Sakuraba Harumi who had been dragged into everyone else's problems.

Just a while ago, Harumi learned how to control magic and Signaltin's power. But not even she knew why. To her, it seemed like she was suddenly able to do it after merging with Yurika. And without any other possible reasons, Koutarou and the others figured that Harumi's change was a by-product of the merging. Yurika admitted that something strange had happened during the merge, and the space quake that had occurred from it was observed by the Blue Knight, lending credibility to the theory.

This would mean that Harumi was now the third magician after Yurika and Maki. And she was also capable of controlling Signaltin, though that fact was only known to those present at the time. That's why Harumi had now become a somewhat unique assistant to Koutarou and the others. Harumi herself wanted to use her powers to help them.

But there was someone against that idea.

And that was Koutarou himself.

"…I'm against this. Sakuraba-senpai has a poor constitution, and she's not very athletic. It's far too dangerous for her to always be with us."

Koutarou worried for Harumi's safety. It was clear that magic put a strain on her body, and he was also against Harumi fighting.

"That's why I think it's best if we just let her help occasionally."

To Koutarou the ideal solution would be to keep Harumi at the same distance she had always been so that she wouldn't get involved in any fights.

"But… Satomi-kun, I can't stay quiet after learning about this!"

Just like Koutarou was worrying about Harumi, Harumi worried for the safety of Koutarou, Yurika and all of the invader girls. To her, they were special people that had shown her the outside world through their two plays together. That's why she wanted to repay her debt and protect their everyday by doing whatever she could.

"Satomi-kun and everyone are my precious friends! Please don't leave me out! Please!"

And the main driving force for Harumi was her strong desire to walk together with Koutarou and the others. She wanted to help those she got along with. She wanted to be with the boy she loved. She knew better than anyone else just how lonely a life of simply staring at things from a distance was.

"Sakuraba-senpai…"

Koutarou started hesitating as Harumi eagerly appealed to him.

He wanted to keep her away out of worry for her safety, but at the same time, he felt like his flaw of keeping a distance to others was influencing his decision. Koutarou was unable to decide on what was the right thing to do.

"…Satomi-kun, can I say something?"

As Koutarou was deep in thought, Maki raised her hand and asked for permission to speak.

"What is it, Aika-san?"

“Based on what happened today, chances are that Sakuraba-san will become another target for Darkness Rainbow. In that case, keeping her close might be the safest thing to do.”

“That’s…”

Maki’s opinion was perfectly logical. Keeping Harumi away also meant it was harder to protect her. So with a clear threat like Darkness Rainbow now around, there was a need to always keep an eye on her.

“No, but…”

However, Koutarou still couldn’t make a decision. Like with Yurika, fighting didn’t suit Harumi. If possible, he wanted her to live peacefully.

“Koutarou, do you hate Harumi?”

Sanae questioned Koutarou, and he responded by shaking his head.

“Of course not, it’s just that I want her to be as safe as possible.”

With a serious expression, Sanae pointed her right index finger towards Koutarou and spoke her mind.

“You know what, Koutarou, the best way to do that is to personally protect what is precious to you. Keeping precious things at a distance is one of your bad habits.”

“She’s right, Satomi-san! We just need to make Sakuraba-senpai promise not to strain herself, and then all of us can protect her together!”

Yurika agreed with Sanae. And it wasn’t just her, everyone in the room agreed. They all shared the same feelings Harumi did. That’s why they felt that she couldn’t be kept at a distance because of her weak constitution.

“Satomi-kun, please!”

Harumi earnestly appealed to Koutarou and stared straight into his eyes.

“Haaa…”

And with that, Koutarou finally changed his mind.

“I understand. Sakuraba-senpai, please try to stay with one of us whenever possible.”

“Thank you, Satomi-kun!”

“However! You must promise not to force yourself if a fight erupts.”

“I understand! I promise!”

Tears of joy started forming around Harumi’s eyes as she smiled brightly.

Part 3

Like that, another three invaders were welcomed into room 106, reaching a previously unprecedented population. And with Kanae here as well, everyone was grateful that it wasn't summer yet.

However, this population only lasted until after dinner. Once everyone had eaten, the invaders left room 106 one after another. They all had their own businesses to attend to. This included making preparations for their new lives or business regarding their position. Because of that, there was a need to leave room 106 for now. That's why only Koutarou and Yurika remained in the room.

"Now that everyone's left, this room feels so much bigger…"

Koutarou muttered as he sat down at the tea table and looked at the front door. Because it was just the two of them, that quiet muttering reached Yurika as well.

"Even though I don't think like that at all when everyone is here…"

"Satomi-san…"

Koutarou's back looked awfully lonely to Yurika, and she felt like she should do something to cheer him up. So she decided to slowly approach him from behind.

"Eii."

After placing herself right behind Koutarou, Yurika stood on her knees and used her hands to block Koutarou's view. It looked just like she was hugging him.

"Yurika?"

"Fufu… Satomi-san…"

Yurika whispered to Koutarou. It was just the two of them, and they were now very close. It was a very gentle and very quiet voice.

“…Did I leave too…?”

“Of course not. I just can’t see you.”

Koutarou could hear Yurika’s voice, her hands were pressed against his face, and her body against his back. Though he couldn’t see her, it was clear she was there.

“Then, I think that’s true for everyone else too. You just can’t see them, but their feelings are still around.”

“…Yurika…”

Thanks to Yurika pointing that out, Koutarou started feeling the same way. Though he couldn’t see them, he wasn’t alone. That felt very good for him.

“Fufufu.”

Koutarou could only hear Yurika’s laugh and feel her warmth. And because her voice was gentle and calm, he got the urge to look at her face. But at the same time, he felt like staying this way. It was a strange feeling he hadn’t felt before.

I see… so this is the real Yurika…

This was Yurika’s true nature, which was normally hidden by all kinds of things. It wasn’t until the two were left alone that Koutarou could see it. That’s why he started being able to accept things he couldn’t before.

“Yurika.”

“Yes?”

“You… really are a magical girl, aren’t you?”

The truth that Yurika was a magical girl was something he never wanted to admit, but at last, he was able to accept it.

“Yes… I’m sorry for never telling you…”

“Don’t worry. I understand why.”

“Satomi-san…”

Koutarou wanted to protect his everyday life with Yurika, and she had gone along with that. That’s why he had no intention of blaming her; in fact, he felt quite the opposite.

“Thank you, Yurika.”

“Yes…”

As Yurika responded to Koutarou, she pushed her hands onto his face a little stronger. Just doing that was enough to convey how she felt. Yurika then stopped covering Koutarou’s eyes and wiped away her tears. She wanted to continue doing it, but that would be hard to do while crying. Having finished wiping away her tears, she put her hand on Koutarou’s shoulder. And as if waiting for that, Koutarou started speaking.

“But… even if that’s the truth, I don’t want to admit it. To me, you’re a classmate and a cosplay loving stupid freeloader.”

That was Koutarou’s wish. He wanted her to be a classmate, not a magical girl. That was something he could only say in this atmosphere and when they weren’t looking at each other.

“Satomi-san…”

With her hand still on Koutarou’s shoulder, she started shedding tears again. But she no longer tried to wipe them away.

They were warm tears of joy, and she knew it would be a waste to wipe them away.

“…I… prefer it that way too…”

Yurika wanted to succeed Nana and become a splendid magical girl. But at the same time, she wanted to be a normal girl when she was with Koutarou. She wanted to spend plain and normal days together, and by doing that, she felt like she would have the courage to overcome anything.

And in that sense, Yurika’s wish perfectly matched Koutarou’s.

“That’s why… I’ll work my hardest to make sure you don’t have to be a magical girl.”

If an enemy appeared, he would work together with her to drive them away.

If there was a mission that had to be accomplished, he would help and finish it as soon as possible.

He wanted to limit the amount of time that Yurika had to be a magical girl.

“Yes…”

Overwhelmed with emotion Yurika spun her arms around Koutarou and tightly embraced him.

Right now, she could understand how Sanae felt.

Even when they were this close, Yurika wanted to get even closer. To the point where if she could leave her body and enter his, she would do so. But because she couldn’t, she simply tightened her embrace. She didn’t know of any other way to convey her feelings.

“…So you just take it easy and cosplay to your heart’s content…”

“…I’ll believe in you… Satomi-san…”

In the end, Yurika was a cosplayer. She left the reality where she was a magical girl behind to continue cosplaying, and being Koutarou’s classmate. That’s what both Koutarou and Yurika wanted. It was the future they both wished for.

The two simply let time pass like that. Having understood each other’s feelings, they didn’t need anything else.

Wait… at this rate, I might…

But after some time had passed, Yurika’s heart started beating faster. And those beats told Yurika to advance their relationship past just gently supporting each other and to become lovers.

Be able to… kiss Satomi-kun… If I get a little closer…

It was clear that Yurika loved Koutarou. She was convinced that Koutarou treasured her as well. That’s why she felt like if she took the step forward, they might be able to become lovers. And her heart was screaming at her to take action.

“Yurika, it’s about time…”

“Y-Yesss…”

That’s why Yurika felt like her heart stopped when Koutarou whispered to her. She thought Koutarou felt the same way, and she was about to lose her mind from all the joy she felt.

…Even if I die now, I’m sure I wouldn’t regret it…

Koutarou removed Yurika’s arms and forcibly pulled her closer. Yurika didn’t resist, and simply entrusted her body to Koutarou. Her heart raced as she wondered what would happen. She was at the very peak of happiness now.

“Grab your pen. We’re starting.”

The Day of Beginnings

“…Huh?”

However, things didn’t play out the way Yurika had hoped.

Yurika was forced to sit next to Koutarou as he put a pen in her hand. Surprised, Yurika hurriedly looked towards Koutarou. As she did, she saw him holding a large number of books.

“W-Wait, Satomi-san, isn’t it a little early for that?!”

Yurika started panicking.

The gap between reality and dream made her desperate to try and stop Koutarou.

“If anything it’s too late! We’re going to go through how to calculate the volume tonight! You don’t have any time to spare!”

However, Koutarou was ruthless. He had already discarded the atmosphere from just a moment ago. The scary Koutarou from this morning had returned.

“That’s not what I meant! Why can’t we just take a little more time to confirm our bond and love?! Skinship is important too you know?!”

Yurika was convinced that she was in the right this time. That things should proceed in a certain order.

“We can do that all we want later! However, you can only study now! We’re already behind schedule, Yurika! Do you understand?!”

Koutarou easily rejected her proposal.

“You’re the one that doesn’t understand!”

Like that, the night grew late. But Yurika was unable to accept this truth and cried as she slammed her fists into the table.

“Normally this is where things get more romantic! Where we gaze into each other’s eyes, hug and kiss! This is wrong, this is completely wrong!”

“Shut it and get to work! You don’t have any rights until your grades go up!”

“Noooooooo, I don’t want thiiiiiss!”

However, when Yurika turns into an adult, she would probably fondly think back of this day as the day when their wonderful everyday life began.

Part 4

While Yurika was spending a painful and sad night, Kiriha and Theia were staring at each other inside the maintenance division of the Blue Knight's hangar. They were in the middle of some kind of work as they operated machine tools.

"There's no mistaking it. This is without a doubt spiritual energy technology…"

"You're sure?"

"Yes. What's more, this is even more advanced than the currently produced model. It's not something that was imitated somewhere else."

The two of them were analyzing the arm that Maya had lost, and the results had just now appeared.

"Which means it's a prototype developed by the People of the Earth?"

"It must be. All of the parts are of high quality, even where it's not needed. This is the hallmark of a test model."

Maya's artificial arm had been made using the People of the Earth's technology. What's more is that it had been made using the highest quality parts, far surpassing that of Karama and Korama. The fact that Maya had this could only mean one thing.

"So the magicians and People of the Earth get along so well that they were given such a high cost prototype… This sure is a problem…"

"Since Maya was behind the incident eleven years ago, it seems quite clear that they were cooperating since back then."

Kiriha had never seen spiritual energy technology in the shape of a human. This meant that it had been made in secret by the faction opposing her. In other words, the radical faction and Darkness Rainbow were working together.

And when Kiriha had been kidnapped as a child by Maya, she had supposedly used spiritual energy technology as well. Kiriha had heard of this from Kanae just a while ago. In other words, they had been working together for at least eleven years now.

"…Kiriha, how does this situation look to you?"

"Considering the fact that they've given the prototype to the magicians, they're past the data collection needed for mass production. It wouldn't be strange for them to already have mass produced models ready. And if they hand those over to the magicians, they will probably get something extremely valuable in return."

"If that's the case, you will have to redo your strategy."

"Yes. I must report this to the chief right away…"

Kiriha mortifyingly ground her teeth.

I just hope I'll make it in time.

If the radical faction was supplying Darkness Rainbow with their technology, it was only obvious that Darkness Rainbow would be doing the same for the radicals. The radical faction had obtained the power of magic without Kiriha and the others finding out about it. What's more is that it should be rather powerful magic. If that newfound power was used against the conservatives who had no knowledge of magic, they wouldn't stand a chance. Kiriha and the others in the conservative faction had to come up with a plan before the radical faction took action.

That was when Theia's bracelet started vibrating. Theia raised her arm slightly and opened a holographic window. She was getting a report that she had received word from Forthorthe.

"What is it?"

"I've received a message from my home world."

Theia controlled a nearby terminal and called up the long-distance communications system.

A concealed line using gravitational waves? It has encryption strength A… what is going on?

Feeling uneasy by the strong security of the inbound communication, Theia opened the message. In that moment, her eyes shot wide open.

"W-What?!"

"What's wrong?!"

Worried after seeing Theia's reaction, Kiriha ran up to her. Theia started to explain the contents of the message in a fluster.

"My mother, it seems my mother has fallen ill!"

"How could this be!"

It was only obvious for the security to be this severe as it reported that the current emperor of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire, Elfaria, had fallen ill.

Afterword

Happy New Year! It's the Author Takehaya.

This time I have safely delivered Volume 12, where evil magicians start moving, and the story's structure starts to change once more.

This series has now been around for four years, and I am deeply moved. I planned to make this into a long story from the very beginning, but because of the fear that it might be cancelled, I developed stories in so that it could end on its third or sixth volume.

In the three volume version, volume two and three would continue in the same fashion as volume 1 before ending. It would end before any foreshadowing began.

In the six volume version, volume two would develop the same way it did now, and then there would be one volume for each invader girl, wrapping up all plots.

Because of that, I could only write the first volume in a way that would work with all three of these versions. Since the characters backgrounds and true intentions would differ in these three versions, there were many times where I could only write a character's lines and their actions, giving me plenty of problems.

Fortunately, thanks to the support of my readers, this series has been able to flourish. Thanks to that, the restrictions were eased by the third volume and then once more on the seventh, which made it easy for me to start gradually using the foreshadowing. As a result, it is now much easier for me to write than it was at the start. Now I can just write about whatever I want while making use of what's been foreshadowed. This kind of hard work was necessary as I tried to write a long story without having much previous experience. Well, it's my own fault (lol).

Whoops, looks like I've already run out of space to write my afterword on, so I will leave it at this. Though things might have gotten easier, I will work to write something that meets everyone's expectations, I hope you can continue to support me.

Well then, let us meet in the afterword of Volume 13.

January 2013

Takehaya

PS: Though it might be a little late, I've made a Twitter account.

Article 16

Studying within the periods detailed below is forbidden.

However, Kasagi Shizuka (Landlady of Corona House and Inhabitant of Room 206) may grant a special exemption.

- JST (GMT+9) 00:00-06:00
- Any time period that Kasagi Shizuka (Landlady of Corona House and Inhabitant of Room 206) arbitrarily defines.

Article 16 Postscript

You need moderation, moderation!! What will you do if you work until you drop!?